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ABSTRACT

A first-hand account of eighth grade students' experiences in learning to write, this monograph, written by students, provides teachers and students with a model for talking about the writing process. The comments in the monograph reflect the students' belief that people can learn to be good writers by writing frequently, sharing their writing and their criticisms with classmates, and discussing their writing process. Appendixes contain various teacher reactions to the writing program and a copy of one student's theme. (HOD)

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Writing Teachers at Work

Writing:
A Window to Our Minds

by Center School's Eighth Graders
and Nancy Marashio

editorial assistance by
Sarah Dandridge

CS 208 690

The National Writing Project
University of California, Berkeley

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Preface

Frequently we as teachers are so concerned with imparting our knowledge to students that we forget that students, too, can teach what they are learning; that in fact, their ability to teach each other is not only a testament of how much they've learned but also one of the most effective tools to reach other students. By writing about how they've learned to write, Nancy Marashio's eighth graders demonstrate that writing is a powerful journey into oneself and that part of that power comes from bringing the journey into daylight to be shared with others. These students have willingly invited us to look through the "windows of their minds" into rooms full of candor and commitment, ideas and feelings. Their voices are real and their learning honest. One writer confides, "Your writing can become better if you express your real feelings in it. For instance, mine did." In their vulnerability they speak to other students in ways a teacher never can.

To me, this is their book's strength and gift: finally here is a first-hand account of students learning to write, written by students for students, (and for teachers as well). These eighth graders believe people can learn to be good writers by writing frequently, sharing their writing and their criticisms with classmates, and discussing their writing process. Their book provides every classroom, teacher and students, with a genuine model for talking about the writing process. I'll use this book in my classes to let student writers speak to their peers. I can hardly wait to read pertinent parts aloud and to encourage individual students to read this book on their own so that they can learn from and feel supported by writers their own age. When an eighth grader says so clearly, "....don't give up....Writing, copying, crossing out and ripping up are all a part of improving," I know my students will listen and believe much more readily because it's the voice of a peer. The authors' tone of caring and commitment to writing and to each other can't help but permeate a classroom and motivate students to continue writing.

Writing: A Window to Our Minds provides a model for talking about learning how to write, a process these insightful students feel is a key ingredient to becoming a good writer. It is an example of a way of learning that most teachers and students are unfamiliar with. There are moments when students see clearly what they know and how they know, when their talk is real and frank because they speak from experience. These are the moments when the teacher steps aside and student expertise becomes the heart and soul of learning. This is the power of this book, of these students' voices, of writing. Their writing is so truthful and compelling that it will guide and teach others on their own writing journey.

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Foreword

This book, like so many other events that affect eighth grade students, is a reflection of their struggle to unfold their opinions, ideas, and experiences. It is representative of the restless search required to synthesize and interpret their thoughts and reactions at a time of their lives when an explosion of emotional, social, physical, and intellectual knowledge engulfs their very existence.

The readers of this book should note that like its authors, the book is a continuous cycle of growth which derives its energies from within and manifests itself through the written expression. It can also be observed as a process of evolution in which skills are developed and form and style become characteristically unique.

In addition, this book is a critical demonstration of our faith in the teaching-learning process, a process which requires the dedicated expertise and guidance of the mentor and the willing desire and spirit of inquiry of the student. Together, these two elements are allowed to interact in a flexible and open environment for the purpose of promoting that growth cycle. It is a vivid example of what can be a real testimony to our public school, a school which can and does reach out to encourage and support meaningful learning experiences.

Henry E. LaBrenche
Superintendent of Schools
Windham, New Hampshire
March 16, 1981

PART ONE:

STUDENTS AS PRIMARY SOURCE

What we think we teach is not always what students learn. For that reason every other year or so I get on a learning journal kick. Students record daily what they learn in my class. Often what they say is not what I attempted to communicate, but always their viewpoint is interesting.

Our monograph could serve as this eighth grade's learning journal about writing, for it is a record of what they are writing and thinking about writing. Every student was encouraged to participate in this process, since each is a developing student writer. The results may be confusing at times because the contradictions were not discarded. The focus might be clearer if I had at least limited the participants to one class, but selecting one would have meant rejecting four others, and I could see no reason for such rejection. Some students chose to become more involved than others, but all 117 worked on the monograph, justifying for me their right to be included.

The progression of the chapters is from the process we followed in forming the monograph, to the student writing about writing, to some results of both their writing and the process. Only one result startled me. These students are involved in what Britton calls "expressive" writing. I expected easy transition from that to the communicative aspect required by the writing of a monograph, yet that transition is the shakiest part of our work. Obviously, application of the writing process from one kind of writing to another is what we have to learn next. But for now, we share with you this student expression of *Writing: A Window To Our Minds.*

An Eighth Grade Monograph?

"I feel exuberant! This is great! This will give us the perfect opportunity to show the country what kids can do. It's spectacular! Good luck to us and thank you, Gerald Camp."

Tony's reaction was typical of the excitement that flashed through Center School's eighth grade in reaction to the National Writing Project acceptance of our proposal to write a monograph about the student view of writing. Karen expressed a bit more humility. "I feel pretty honored about participating in writing a book. Also since this man knows so much about writing and says he's sure it will be fascinating, I feel even more honored." Janet was both self-confident and critical. "I feel very glad that they like our idea and accepted it. But I feel bad that they don't think our class can write over a forty page book. That in a way makes us sound not as good as we are." Agreeing with Janet, Craig went one more step; to him this book reflected a mission. "My reaction to the letter is that people can *learn* to be good writers. You made us realize how good we can write." Dave supported his contention about what the students could accomplish by first making some decisions about the National Writing Project letter. "I think that letter was very interesting and friendly. I am surprised about how excited he is in us writing a book. Although he has his doubts about us writing a forty page book, we will prove him wrong."

While students were recording such confident reactions in their daybooks,* I was writing, "Elation surges through me, tinged with fear that we won't accomplish as much as we hope to." After all, we had been almost offhand in our writing of the proposal; what voice could the 117 students in the five eighth grade Language Arts classes in our small New Hampshire school have? I was sharing the letter of acceptance class by class, wondering how many students would be willing to involve themselves in the necessary work and finding that in their unanimity they were readier than I was.

The immediate written responses to hearing the letter were our beginning. As individuals each student began to think about possible formats, focuses, and chapter setups and to record the possibilities in their daybooks. The underlying question for all of us (though we said it variously) was how the students felt they had grown as writers.

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* a daily journal we use to jot down ideas and processes

Set to the task of the book, students came in for our first discussion overflowing with ideas. What we discovered was that the more we talked, the less we agreed, even by class, on an overall setup. We made only two decisions that day. The first was that questions about writing should be asked to the whole eighth grade; the second was that growth could be shown by comparing what they considered to be poor themes with good themes. We tried to brainstorm to find a title so we could have a theme to develop, but that attempt produced only panic. We couldn't even decide how to group ourselves; by classes, by ideas, by friendships, by process of writing—we simply couldn't decide.

That indecision was handicapping our attempt to determine overall goals and directions. As soon as we switched our approach, the disunity faded. My daybook entry on the second day of our work documented that change:

> Yesterday we were hyper about this whole project. We had been excited about the NWP acceptance of us for a monograph, but we all backed off in a sense from beginning. Title and chapters would be necessary, but none of us had specific suggestions, so we plunged into the middle. Each student feels strongly about what should be in the book, so as individuals each is selecting an area of writing that has been personally meaningful or helpful. Meanwhile I'm going bananas. To have this book evolve from students means I have to back off, to allow them space to make decisions, to follow the process I say I believe in. It was easy to do that for themes and for individual writing days because expectations and limitations such as time were clear to them and imposed by me. But I don't know how long this will take or what will tie together what each is doing, and I don't want to impose a scheme and jam them all into it. In themes they stand as individuals; what holds us together there is our involvement and concern for each other and for what we choose to say. I can't tell how to expand that to hold together a monograph. I trust them to do that, but I worry.
>
> To give an added sense of outside audience yet a trusted one to at least one class, Superintendent LaBranche came in for yesterday's discussion. He left with an echo of my "I don't know." He too likes to have goals established and work toward their accomplishment. I again wonder if I should establish the goals for the book; even the Accelerated class when listing goals seemed to wander so widely that no unification is visible. But I believe in making it a book for and by the students.
>
> Last night I had planned to come up with a schema, a backup, but then chose deliberately not to.

> Today I feel relaxed, confident. We discussed the paths to take, the accomplishments we need to establish quickly versus what will evolve, and we've plunged in. To write, I always tell them as I was told, begin to write. They took the next step; to write a book they have begun to write a book.

By this second day specific reactions began to stand out. Bobby H., uncertain as a writer, especially in the area of taking risks, said that his first choice as his topic for the book was building a unity, what he has trouble with; he took a risk. Room 1 set itself into groupings, working together to try to see their way better; they vocalized their need not to merge their focus with other classes because they trusted each other and wanted to present their view as a closely knit class undiluted by outsiders. Room 2 plunged into its usual straightforward problem-solving approach. Accelerated exhibited a desire to merge, a need not to stand as individuals: insecurity. Lisa M. at first wrote preachily, then switched because she knew *she* wouldn't respond to that approach; she felt insecure about writing as an "I" till she thought about how naturally and effectively she uses "I" in her themes. The self-chosen illustrators in Room 5 began visualizing even before being given the words to illustrate. Being used to seeing these students feel comfortable about their theme writing, I began to realize from this student insecurity what a different kind of writing experience we were accepting by deciding to do this book.

The third day we received a follow-up NWP letter with some suggested guidelines. Then students decided they needed to work together more so they'd help encourage the writing strengths they knew in each other. According to my daybook,

> everyone is more at ease with what we're doing. They're working with a will now—no more "I don't know what to say." They responded to the NWP suggestion that papers of "a few" students be followed, laughing because they plan that all who want to will be in. Groupings are more noticeable with lots of interaction, asking of others, even moving around the room for quick, informal surveys. We have some material now to gather and will, next Wednesday, decide on how to order what we have and whether to gather more. Decisions were the hardest part, not the writing. That's consistent with what bothered them about themes in the beginning...a difference, though, is that decision evasion in the beginning of the year was from fear, lack of confidence, no belief that the self could achieve; now it's from eagerness to succeed, uncertainty about which choice to make, though most have a sure direction for focusing what is important to them.
>
> Bobby H. was in for recess because he couldn't decide; sequence and building an idea are problems he believes need attention, but focus and unity also attract him. We discussed definitions

> of each, saw ways to deal with them; then he said he wouldn't have time tonight...it would be hard.
>
> So many summed up what they wanted to write but couldn't get a reason for expanding. We created a mythical eighth grader who comes in this week, twenty themes behind, and decided that catching that person up on what is important to the now-involved writers might be a way to go.
>
> Lisa M. now has an image—symptoms and an illness—and is trying to find the form her idea needs. Scott H. moved away from some of his usual classmates to concentrate.

Day four was devoted to preparing the questionnaire and to again suggesting title possibilities. Watching them brainstorm to write questions about aspects of writing that are important to them, either ones answered or ones that still need answers, checking each other in pairs for clarity about what the questions were looking for, selecting the most important questions, and then sequencing them, I recorded

> sometimes I feel I'm in over my head—not that the students lack enthusiasm or involvement. Everyone is getting and staying on task, but the sheer volume yet variation of what they're producing is overwhelming. How will we fit it together?
>
> And yet...deep inside the juices are flowing. This is why I'm in teaching. The students are tasking themselves now. They too begin with "It's hard..." but follow with "I wonder if _____ will work" or "If I _____, will people see _____?" They began with excitement that they were actually writing a book, with almost a distraction from the evolutionary process we need. But now, they're puzzling over the issues they've chosen in order to find answers meaningful to them; the book right now is simply a by-product. They *are* learning more about writing than they could be taught ... and they all seem to love it. *Every* eighth grader in my five Language Arts classes is involved. Like theme days, these past two days demand no reminders to get on task, no disciplining. And they're sharing the work, supportive of each other. They all own this work and have become unified. Scott R. said in passing, "We're all *together* about this," and they are. In a way if the book doesn't come off, it wouldn't matter. But of course to support their effort we must make it work, and work so we can share it with pride.

Day five was theme day, our twenty-first Friday of orally reading and commenting on everyone's themes. The topic was "Theme Days, for example, outstanding moments during theme class," but, as usual, now that they've been freed to accept or reject my topics, most rejected that and followed their own directions, even though that topic was aimed toward the book. Vinny did write about reading the first week or two and reading the twenty-first, highlighting the difference between the first week's "Do I have to read?" and the "Can I read first?" "Go this way" that were repeated class after class on this theme day. Jody and several others emphasized the togetherness of themes, and Room 2 wrote about all kinds of moments that "shine." An underlying goal of eighth grade theme writing is helping students find a voice and use it to show they have something important to say; they easily embodied that goal in their own ways on that day.

As we worked through the second week on the book, we seemed to settle into more obvious patterns. First, goals were clarified. Everyone agreed that the book should attempt

— to make people realize the importance of writing;
— to show how writing can be easier and enjoyable, not a chore;
— to motivate people to write;
— to help people write better;
— to give ways to understand writing;
— to keep people interested.

Then we resolved the question about the title. My suggestion to call the book *Seeing With The Student Eye* to emphasize the need to seek out and understand the perspective of students about writing was voted down. The students considered a deeper need; they want the reader to see with his own eyes, for as eighth graders they value the "I" point of view. But at the same time they want the reader to see into their inner selves through their writing; they feel that the impact of writing is in their minds. After the vote was taken, we began to work through their title frame of *Writing: A Window To Our Minds.*

Chapters began to take shape, class by class. Though we did try electing two student representatives per class to act as a unifying board and to set up one series of chapters for all students to work on, that effort failed because of the compromises such a blend would cause. The classes demanded the right to maintain the identity of what each had processed already and to work in their usual way together. The questionnaire was completed, then cut into pieces to be tallied, prompting the reaction, "Cutting to write a book!?"

Student daybook comments reflected the depths attempted. Linda L. said, "It is neat to be writing a book in eighth grade. I like it because we get to work with other people and use our talent writing. I realize by doing the book I still have a lot to learn about writing." Joe K. admitted, "I like the idea of writing a book, but I didn't know how hard it was." Nancy H. asserted, "I really love writing the book because it can let people know that we just don't take our writing like something we have to do." Sharon K. explained, "In class today Danny came up to me with the topic that he is doing. He asked questions concerning my way of writing. I thought and a few friends joked about Danny being a reporter because all he asked was "Why." How he is going about his topic is good because he asked everyone for different points of view. Pam Binette has asked for writings of our earlier years which is good because the writing will show how we progress. So I think the book is starting to make a little progress with each person working hard and doing research on their topic instead of taking it off their heads." Chrissy was enjoying the writing because "it gives us time to really work together and gather ideas and share experiences. It gave me an idea of how hard it is to write a book." And Maureen insisted, "It takes a lot of determination and organization to complete a tough task."

Not until the end of the first draft did we experience stress again. The putting together was crucial yet again their area of trouble. Recopying, reordering, emphasizing, cutting, we finally put together all the pieces we'd developed, not once but several times. Even this version reflects simply where students were at the moment in their writing process; it, like them, will change.

Writing

Students at Center School always used to say they learned most in Phys. Ed. Under Bill Newcomb's influence they built awareness not only of each skill but also of their own developing mastery, which in turn fostered eagerness to attempt the next skill. Physical education was important to them because they could see both the processes they were learning and their own progress in those processes.

Writing became important to students only when they could see that it, too, was composed of skills and learning that they could master. They now value writing because they are aware that it gives voice to meanings important to them, that it can be maneuvered to form variations pleasing to them, and that—most of all—writing is a sharing, an exchange, that helps each writer grow both individually and as part of the group he or she shares writing with. Student acceptance of learning physical education by doing has clarified for me what once seemed an educational paradox: only by at first floundering, then becoming immersed in the process of writing do students change their attitude from one of rejection to one of total involvement. Since that first clarification about teaching writing, students have, for me, become the ultimate source of decision-making and problem-solving about the development of student writers. Therefore writing is one topic we write about frequently.

While writing, students, as developing experts, struggle with their position on how a paper is written, on problems discovered through the writing, and on the subject written about. Writing about the subject of writing intensifies their understanding of what they are learning and their awareness of both their process of writing and of themselves as student writers.

One of our first student papers was a tentative definition of writing; students were simply asked to complete the definition "Writing is ....." Their answers included

- — expressing what you feel on paper with words
- — letting your feelings flow through your pencil
- — letting your mind go and then writing it down on paper

- putting your imagination on paper
- a way to express feelings and communicate
- taking thoughts from your mind and putting them on paper for everyone to read or hear
- a permanent way of expressing yourself
- taking time and getting facts, then thinking how you can make those facts sound good
- taking your thoughts, feelings, and ideas on a certain subject and putting them down on paper in an organized, patterned form
- a knack where people can create different concepts
- the basis of all intelligence

Such student definitions reveal basic agreements among the students and include many of the aspects of writing usually emphasized by experts. In addition to views about content and audience, students immediately suggested the process involved in writing. The students first saw writing as expressing or translating awarenesses into words, next sharing, communicating, telling to some other. They perceived the subtle distinction between telling and showing, for they explained writing as a re-creation of their awareness. They even joked about their show-and-tell years as a basis for eighth grade writing.

Because they so readily accepted the need to show as well as tell, the students then invented images for writing in order to fill out their definitions. They suggested that writing is like

- music. It shows feelings.
- wind. Thoughts will come and then disappear.
- a river, always moving with many different things doing different ways.
- an ocean wave with more than just surface area.
- a tree, growing on one fact or feeling then branching out.
- travelling through space. You can always go deeper and explore new frontiers.
- a dream. You can get into detail and be very descriptive or step in the middle.
- a cloud, sometimes drifting over you and sometimes stopping to give you a shower of thoughts or ideas.
- money because it's always being passed on.
- drugs because you never know what the effects will be.
- a window to your mind.

Some images were subjective and worked from the self; without knowing the term they projected expressive writing as the source of all other writing. Other images indicated concern with the writing process. None focused on writing as simply a product. In these images students considered content based strongly on feelings, form as changing rather than fixed, writers as choice makers whose results vary because of their choices, and audience as receivers with their own powers of choice. Through such considerations students indicate what are for them meaningful aspects of writing.

Students also made writing meaningful for themselves by controlling and accepting responsibility for the directions their writing took. When asked, each individual willingly listed goals personally worth achieving; each class worked together to clarify, select, eliminate, and organize so that individual goals could be translated into boundaries and standards of value to the class as a group. In fact through their give and take they seemed to have less trouble differentiating between individual rights and group responsibilities than I did. Eventually, through consensus, the following guidelines for the grade emerged:

- Every student has the ability to write in his/her own way.
- Students should listen to others but develop their own styles from what others say.
- Students should read to others so they see writing as a way to communicate something.
- Students recognize feelings are important and even if they are underneath they should be brought out.
- Students should apply what they learn to each new paper.
- Students should have time to write.
- Students should be able to write about whatever they feel the urge or need to.
- Students should learn to expand their viewpoints.
- Students should be encouraged to have many ways to develop ideas and not be assigned one way.
- Teachers shouldn't preach; they should sit down and try to understand what a student wants to write.
- Teachers shouldn't put down students for ideas, methods, etc. just because a teacher doesn't like it.
- Teachers should work at developing confidence in writing.
- Teachers should expect students to apply skills to some form of writing and not to a worksheet.

- Students should be graded on grammar and punctuation only when they have had practice with developing content, so all parts will come together easier.
- Constructive criticism should be given and taken with no hard feelings.

Developed by students actively looking for insights into what made some of their writing work and some fall flat, these statements reflect the perceptions of involved writers. The statements, like comments by experts, would be ineffective if dumped on the next class, but when they evolve from a class in whatever ways it sees and shapes understandings, such statements about writing have strong impact on the directions taken by their writing.

Even student evaluation of the quality of their own writing can evolve from standards of their own making. Having learned holistic scoring, Center School eighth graders develop descriptors according to what is important for the quarter they are in.* Their expectations, quarter by quarter, turn out to be stringent, as shown by this listing from the quarter we worked on form.

DESCRIPTORS FOR A 4 THEME

Group 1
- strong and meaningful beginnings and endings
- lot of details in order
- stays on the subject
- creative
- thoughtful
- catches and holds your interest
- should build up to strong ending
- correct grammar
- not having distractions that interrupt the flow of the paper
- strong writing itself

Group 2
- deep details
- descriptive details
- orderly sequence
- creative

---

* Again using the process of recording individual priorities in daybooks, clarifying, selecting, and eliminating in small groups and then as classes, they discovered their common priorities.

Group 2

- holds reader's interest
- makes the reader understand the meaning
- correct grammar

Group 3

- strong beginning and the rest follows it
- keeps the details organized, in order
- a topic that catches the interest of the audience and writer
- makes the writing so the reader can see and understand what is happening
- a sentence that ties the whole writing together at the end
- correct usage of words
- no mechanical errors
- readable

Group 5

- beginnings catch the reader's attention, make them want to read more
- ending tie together, sum up
- have a lot of thought put in
- descriptive details
- has well-planned steps, sequence
- expresses the idea fully and completely
- refined idea
- no mistakes

Accelerated

- original
- a distinct, flowing pattern
- strong beginning, strong ending
- properly used grammar and mechanics
- sequenced properly
- should be readable, no crossing out
- minimal spelling errors
- strong in its idea
- make people interested, hold reader's attention
- bring out ideas and thoughts

Test and measurement experts might quibble about how measurable or objective some student descriptors are. However, students agreed that these descriptors state what they value in writing; students are willing and eager to be evaluated on their attempts to work into their papers what the descriptors hold them accountable for. As writers, the students learn to care about developing their own standards and changing them as their awarenesses about writing expand.

Those expanding awarenesses across the grade are best illustrated by the student-selected questions and answers about writing on the following questionnaire prepared especially for this book.

From the first day we began working on this book we agreed that the students would decide on questions they have answered or need to answer in order to grow as writers and that the questions should be answered by each member of the eighth grade; that way they could discover if there were trends in their views about writing. Individually, as small groups, and then as classes they worked to prepare, refine, and sequence questions about writing that they felt would be worth answering. The questions most widely accepted and most frequently asked were placed on the questionnaire and answered by the eighth graders as individuals. The results of the questionnaire follow.

1. List five words that best describe what writing is to you.

The word *fun* was the most frequently selected word; nearly half of the student respondents included that word. *Fun* was followed closely and often on the same lists by the words *hard* and *difficult,* suggesting that students did not select *fun* as merely an easy choice.

Several words appeared on approximately twenty-five per cent of the questionnaires; these words were *exciting, feelings, expressing,* and *interesting.* Words appearing in significant numbers were *boring, good, funny, meaningful, thinking, emotional, creative,* and *imaginative.* A few students selected the following words: *easy, creative, bad, important, imaginative, helpful, descriptive, experience, important, life, complicated, me, productive,* and *time-taking.*

The five words on the questionnaires produced no overall trends but did suggest trends of individual students.

2. What problems are you having as a writer?

A majority of the students describe their problems as "getting the sequence right," "tying my theme together," "trying to develop my topic in steps," "to have everything follow through," "fitting the ideas together and getting a clear sequence," or "to put everything in order and tie all the thoughts together that belong together."

A significant number cited thinking of or coming up with topics or ideas to write about as a serious problem.

Several students find their troubles in punctuation, spelling, and the mechanics of grammar.

Several other students were concerned with audience, with answers to "making people understand," "describing my topics well enough to make people feel they are there," "expressing my feelings in a way for everyone to understand," or "writing something that will please myself and you."

"Expressing feelings," "explaining feelings," and "putting ideas into words" were also significant problems for several students.

Individual responses included a range from overall writing problems labeled as "writing themes" and "putting things down on paper" to people problems such as "nothing really except laziness" and "I sometimes have trouble thinking."

Two fortunate students said they have no problems with writing.

3. What solutions have worked to solve some of your writing problems?

On this question answers were quite consistent. In a word the majority suggested the best solution to writing problems is "practice."

A significant number of students found their problems easing when they selected topics differently, when they used such approaches as: "expressing my feelings," "writing ideas down as they come into my head," "to think of something that has happened or that I know good," "writing to match my moods," "think of experiences I had, then build from that," and "putting my feelings into writing."

Several students found that simply spending more time on their writing eased their problems. Several others "talk to other people and the teacher" to expand ideas and to see if they are saying what they mean. In addition "listening to other people's themes and reading comments" has given students openings toward solving problems.

A few students found the specific techniques of brainstorming and "tear and build"* to be effective for them.

Individual solutions ranged from "try and stop making the same mistakes that I started with" to "take long walks."

4. What were your biggest fears about writing? What are your biggest fears now?

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* A description of the "tear and build" process will be found on pp. 27-28.

Most students stated "reading in front of the class" as the biggest fear they had.

Present fears fall into several categories: "not getting the meaning across," "grades," "not being able to think of a topic," "having people think my writing is boring or stupid," and "worrying about people not liking my themes." "Reading in front of the class" still ranks as a fear for a few students, though several also said they'd fear "not being able to share themes any more."

Many students insist they don't have any fears now.

5. What patterns do you recognize in your own process of writing?

No majority answer appeared, though a significant number focused on their approach to structuring ideas, specifically on ability to build themes better, to connect and to unify or even to recognize when they are not connecting and unifying.

Many focused on patterns reflecting improvement in their writing or the opposite, getting worse or getting into a slump. Many see patterns in what they write about: feelings, emotions, people, death and sad stories, violence, problems, funny happenings, and science fiction continuations.

Individual answers include: "tend to put two beginnings," "leave out too many details," "seem to drag on," "every other week I'm in the mood for themes," and "my story or theme starts off the same way—I was walking down the street."

Only a few students responded that they didn't know their patterns.

6. What freedom is necessary for you as a student writer?

All of the students answered that they like the freedom to write on whatever they want to write on. Some qualified their answers by saying they like optional assignments in case they get stuck. Others added that they like freedom to write when they choose to or that they like freedom to decline to read orally now if they feel the need not to share a theme.

7. What restrictions do you feel should be placed on student writing?

An overwhelming majority of students answered "none," with explanations like, "I think we should have the privilege of writing the way we feel."

Of those who believe in restrictions, the majority said that profanity should be considered; several sought total restriction, but most felt restriction should be placed on "profanity that doesn't fit."

A few students felt writing should be restricted to correct grammar and punctuation.

Individuals suggested writing "should keep the reader's attention," must have "an interesting subject," writers should "be given a set date when writing is due," and "no Kalubians" (see p. 45).

8. Should you be given a topic to write about? Why or why not?

All but ten students said no. The ten who said yes said that the topic should be offered but as a choice, not as a demand.

9. How does sharing themes orally affect you? How does sharing affect your writing?

Most of the comments were positive. The positive effects on the writers included "makes me trust more people in my class," "I like the students to know how I feel and how I write," "gives me different ideas and similarities," "makes me look forward to class on Friday," "shows how other people write," "enjoy hearing how others feel about different topics," "I can see a good theme against a bad one," "fun," "helps me to be confident," "enables me to spread my imagination," "gives a good feeling," "I know I'm not alone," "helps me to figure out my problems," and "makes me enjoy Fridays and gives me something to look forward to."

Positive effects on the writing included "you know you have to do good because people will be listening," "if I make mistakes, I can correct and fix the next theme better," "makes it easier to write," "get ideas," "lets me realize different types of writing," "gives me confidence in what I write," "classmates tell me what needs to be strengthened," "gives me ideas on what to do for Friday," "tells me what others like to hear about," "makes me write better because I would be ashamed to share a poor theme," "an effective way of finding what I need to work on," "lets me open up and kids like one now for what's inside not just out," "limits what I am willing to write," and "I can get other people's feeling on my writing."

A few felt sharing themes was not helpful to them because they became nervous when reading out loud. Some did not feel their writing was affected positively but gave no explanation.

10. What should be kept the same about theme days? What should be improved?

Agreement was overwhelming that ingredients to be kept the same are "everything," "the whole 'event' should be kept the same," "grades," "the circle," "the attitude," "atmosphere because laughing helps to ease tension," "the same sharing and commenting, and the comments," and "creativity."

Suggestions for improvement varied. A significant number agreed that the following should be improved: "nothing," "more time," "on theme days Language class should be made longer," "more theme days," "do themes on Thursday and Friday," and "more time spent on comments." Time obviously is a key issue for theme days in the minds of the participants. Themes themselves should be improved according to a significant number, even to the point that "everybody should have a 4 theme." Commenting should be improved; "more people should respond to each theme," more "constructive criticism" was seen as necessary, and many agreed with the teacher proposal that we ban, "that's good" and "I like it a lot."

Some suggested that grammar must be improved. Others felt that we shouldn't "make people read if they don't want to."

One individual suggested that to improve theme days "we should sing all the themes," and this individual has acted on his own suggestion at times.

11. Do grades influence your writing? Why or why not?

The majority said yes for reasons such as "it helps your writing improvement," "they give me more of a goal; a better grade usually means a better piece of writing," "it encourages me to write good," "I like to know what the teacher thinks about my writing," "they make me try harder," "trying to get a good grade is a challenge," and "they give me confidence." One individual said the influence was from "comments mostly."

About twenty per cent said no, that "it has nothing to do with it," "grades do not explain the writing," "I like the way I write no matter what the grade," "I improve my writing on my own," "I influence my writing," "I write for myself," and "grades shouldn't influence your writing; just because you are stupid doesn't mean you can't write."

12. How do you expect your teacher to help you grow as a writer?

The majority expect the teacher "to make comments orally and on the paper, where my weaknesses and strengths are," to "discuss themes with the class," to "help me know how to find my own mistakes," and to "give her true comments."

A significant number say the teacher should help "by telling us how to improve."

A few seek suggestions about ways to write: "give as many ideas as possible," "help me write in better form and let me write how I feel," "teach how to put right words in right place, leads, endings, more techniques," "advise you." A few others focus on practice by saying the teacher should "not tell me anything except practice, practice," and "have us write as usual." Some focus on the individual help a teacher should give: "help me when I have a good idea and tell how to develop it further and better," "ask me questions, why I used this and that," "help when I start slipping," "understand what my writing is about," "just to listen," "influence me," "help me understand other writings better," and show a "positive outlook on each individual writer." As a person the students expect the teacher to "read her themes" and show "patience."

Three people did not expect help. One said, "I don't, but if she does I don't mind." Another has "no idea," and one says the best help is to "leave me alone."

13. What contributes to your writing growth? What prevents your writing growth?

Both contributions and preventions seem to fall in three overall categories: what happens personally, how others act, and the writing process itself.

What happens personally to contribute to writing growth includes "trying to make every theme better than the last," "I realize inside what to do," "hearing themes," "the more my mind opens to other things, the easier writing is," "experience," "emotions," "doing it," "mood," and "self recognition." Others contribute by "suggestions to write better," "their comments," "correcting writing," "talking about it," "admiring," and "sharing." Elements of the writing process that contribute are "ideas," "getting a good grade," "writing every week," "writing intensely," "learning new and different skills," and a few even said "learning parts of speech."

What happens personally to prevent writing growth includes "problems that stand in my way," "laziness," "not trying," "feelings about school," and "when it feels like an assignment." Others prevent growth by "rejections," "deadlines," "events at home," and "surroundings." The only element of the writing process mentioned as a prevention, and mentioned frequently, was spelling. One individual said, "I've not found anything that prevents."

14. What is improving in your writing? What is not improving?

Listed by a significant number were elements of the following: details, creativity, ideas, form, excitement, my imagination, topic development, idea patterns, ways I describe feelings, and writing of a whole. A few mentioned meaning, ability to pick topics, and putting ideas together.

What was not improving included spelling, ways of putting down thoughts, punctuation, grammar, repetition of words, word choice, and security about writing. Ideas and form also appeared as negatives, though they were positives for others.

15. By what do you judge writing? As you write more, do your standards for judging change? Explain.

For the first time several students left a blank, not answering the questions.

The majority judge writing by how the writer "follows an idea through."

Several judge "by the person and his or her writing potential," by "how interesting" the paper is, and by how it "compares to others." "Flow" was also a frequent answer.

A few suggest ways to judge include: "personal standards," "involvement of the writer, even if I don't like it," "feeling," "detail," "content and how well it's expressed," "how deep," "if I can really understand what the people are writing about," and "if they are boring or not."

The few who said no, their standards have not changed, judge by what they like, and they say that doesn't change.

The majority said their standards have changed for reasons such as "I learn what more to look for," "practice," "as I grow," "I expect more of myself and others," "my understanding of connections is better," "I see the problems better," "we know what a 4 is now," "the more you write, the harder the grading should be," "now I see form too," and "I find more things that are important in writing that I didn't realize before."

16. What do you feel is the most important lesson you learned in writing? How did you learn it?

Again, this question was not answered by all students.

Two ideas were dealt with by a significant number. One was expressed as "staying with the topic through the story" or "it has to tie in" or "themes follow through." Many learned to unify their themes through the "tear and build" process. The other was to write with feeling.

Several focused on their most important lesson as "how to put down my ideas" which was learned by "listening to others" and "good form" which was learned from the teacher.

Individual answers to this question varied. Examples and reasons are

- That I write for me alone.
- Writing itself is the most important lesson, and I learned it by writing more.

- It takes practice to learn how to be a good writer. The more you write the better you are.
- Sequence through practice.
- Writing creatively.
- How to express myself, by listening to other themes and talking about them.
- Putting time into writing.
- To stay on one topic instead of dribbling on, by theme corrections.
- Being proud, by myself.
- That I will use writing when I grow up, by the work I do.
- Thinking, by wandering in my mind.
- My mood depends on my writing.
- That writing is easy, by writing a lot.
- How to get ideas and facts together, by the teacher and other students.
- Writing can be fun, by hearing themes.
- Take criticism and grow from it, by experience.
- You can't always have a good theme, by having some bad ones.
- Show not tell.
- To be independent.
- Need to put time and effort into writing, by bad grades.
- Not to put down my themes and let the reader be the judge, by comments in class.
- Writing is a good way to express myself, by writing what I really feel.

17. Share what you feel is the most important advice you could give about writing.

Five ideas were shared by a significant number of students. They are "Think *before* you write," "Write what you want to write about, not what someone else feels you should write," "Write what you feel," "Always check over your paper," and "Practice."

Several students said either "Don't hold back," or "Keep on writing." Individuals shared a wide range of advice, as their comments reveal:

- Write something you feel is good, and most likely other people will think it is good.

- To improve writing you have to practice, get comments, and ask questions.
- Write for other people.
- You can't understand writing until you do it.
- Write what is natural; write how you feel.
- Keep trying; don't give up.
- Follow and put ideas down that fit to an understanding.
- The harder you work at it, the more you will enjoy.
- Watch for spelling errors.
- When writing a theme, read it over to make sure you understand it (so others will.)
- Write about what you know about.
- Keep going into subjects deeper than before.
- Check punctuation, form, and interest.
- Pick a good topic.
- Keep improving.
- Follow your ideas through the hilt; add details, but don't crowd.
- Try, think, and write!
- Write a lot.
- Be proud and like what you write.
- Try and learn from your mistakes.
- Writing can be boring.
- Have a good idea and write all you know about that topic, even if it takes weeks.
- Write according to your moods.
- Write what you feel, and don't hold back.
- Keep an orderly sequence.
- Put time and effort into your writing.
- Ask questions.
- Have Mrs. M. as a Language Arts teacher.
- Sharing should be stressed.

Conclusions about the questionnaire responses could be endless but would be misleading. Different students would prepare different questions with their own variations of answers. What is significant is the process. Students learn to write in part by communicating about writing.

They are willing to share the inside story about the writing process as they see it. Defining, questioning, probing, they involve themselves in the writing process. Because they learn to care about writing, they accept responsibility for getting the best from both themselves and their writing. Their commitment to their work strengthens what they write; what they write strengthens their commitment. And so it goes. They become willing to share the inside story about the writing process as they see it.

This monograph is one of their sharings and faced them with another real reason for commitment as writers, another step in their understanding of writing. The monograph is also our best proof so far that students provide a unique angle of vision about students writing.

PART TWO:

A WINDOW TO OUR MINDS

Themes are the center of eighth grade writing. The superintendent of schools, the nurse, students from other classes, the principal—any person who chooses to enter Room 1 on theme days has a theme, for theme days create a circle of sharing. The first day of school eighth graders are firmly told that each Friday a theme will be due and will be read aloud to the class. For Theme #1 students enter fearfully. Given the choice to read their own themes or to exchange and read another's theme, most students exchange. From the beginning non-writing is not a choice open to students. The end of the previous year was always so good that such new beginnings are a shock even for me; firmness, not fun, must set the tone. The theme process during the first few weeks remains forced, and I am heartily disliked, described as witch and worse. Breakthroughs come, though, since themes are now part of the lore of Center School. One after another the students find the attention given and received during the theme readings expects, even demands, that they write well. As writing improves, confidence builds; the theme circle takes root.

Student writing in all its variations serves as text; issues, questions, problems are handled as they are revealed in the writing. Since these eighth graders are just finding their voices, gimmicks are few. They like activities such as "tear and build", adapted from Bill Cook of Dartmouth. First they are given a paper covered with a scattering of thirty-five words; they tear the paper into its individual words and then play, puzzling the words into individually different but meaningful shapes in an exercise much like loosening up for phys. ed. Later they provide the words. Later still they puzzle sentences into more effective themes through the same tear and build process.

Students also react strongly to the childhood keepsake process from Chris Robinson of the Exeter Writing Project. Through selecting, bringing in for show and tell, and finally writing about a chosen childhood keepsake, the students learn early in the year to probe for depth, to know from the inside that meaning is more than what others see in a bedraggled Snoopy or a fading baby quilt. But usually we simply learn from each other's papers, with respect for both writer and what is written the only inflexible rule imposed by me.

Our overall process is fairly consistent. First quarter we work with content, using only what students say as the focus of our discussions about the themes we share. Second quarter we add form, merging discussion of what is said with how to say it most effectively. Third quarter come the skill charts adapted from NCTE models; errors are coded and recorded each week to show students first what their errors are and then whether or not they are correcting effectively. Fourth quarter we abstract some, discussing and at times achieving the synthesis that directs writing toward art.

Throughout this process we discuss the inside story about what students see themselves going through as student writers; we talk about their viewpoints, and each student gleans what will be helpful at the moment. Our sharing process evolves as questions or needs or crises arise in the classroom.

Stilling that process, formalizing it into unchanging words, has turned out to be much more difficult than we expected. We had no trouble accumulating writing about writing. Students were clear about what has been important in their own changing views. They even moved easily within their own classes into groupings of common direction. But structuring the window to their minds presented a disheartening barrier. We decided to reflect the theme process they are growing through. Included in this section are individual explanations, group expressions, and dialogues by whole classes through which writing is viewed as a window to student minds.

1.

Look inside, and you might see
Who we are and what we'll be.
Look inside, deeper this time;
See the things held in our minds.
Look inside, look way in far
At who we were and what we are.
Look inside, and you might find
A golden window to our minds.

— Maureen Moynihan

Theme #1 Panic

Though they laugh about it now, students know from experience how beginning writers feel. The panic about Theme #1 remains vivid in the minds of the Accelerated class. In order to recreate that feeling for teachers and for students who need to see that in their first panic they are not alone, the class decided to tape their remembrance of how they felt the first Friday they moved into the theme circle. The taping, their first, did not come out as the intended conversation; instead the class responded in turn to the question "How did you feel about having to share your first theme?"

Blink - I thought it was awful. When I came in, I didn't want to read. I switched papers.

Scott J. - I was nervous, and I was excited. I didn't want to read it. I was scared, and afterwards I was relieved.

Jay - Good job, Scott.

Bobby - First I didn't know what's a theme? Why didn't you tell us what to write? And what's a pattern? And this is dumb. And what are we supposed to do—a poem, prose, or what?

Pam B. - What are other people in the class gonna think about my theme? Is mine going to compare with them, or is mine going to be completely ridiculous? And how embarrassed I would be doing this.

Dan - When we came in, I was sitting next to Tony, and he went first, and he picked the other way so I felt really relieved.

Nancy - When I first came in, I didn't really understand so I switched papers with Janet.

Pam W. - First of all I didn't know what a theme was. I never heard the word before in my life, and so I didn't know what I was writing. Plus I just got here, and I didn't know anybody, and so I switched my theme with Lana.

Craig - I remember that.

Pam W. - Her theme was good, and everybody said, "That was good..." And then when everybody switched around I guess Sherri

Carle read mine, and then after she read it everybody said, "That was dumb." I was laughing because everybody thought it was *hers!* And everybody thought that the one I read was really good. Then I figured out what a theme was.

Cheryl - I was embarrassed and afraid of what people might say about my theme. I was worried that it wasn't adequate.

Joe - I was worried. I just thought my theme stunk, and I didn't want to read it.

Patty - I was scared and nervous and worried too. I hated Language after that.

(General laughter)

Craig - So didn't everybody else.

Megan - I thought my theme was so stupid. I had someone else read it because I would have been too embarrassed to read it.

Karen - I was scared when I...didn't know; even reading my own I was nervous.

Amy - Me too because when I was reading I thought I would get stuck on words. I thought my theme was okay for the first theme. I had a real bad one to read though. I was worried about reading someone else's theme, but I couldn't say no.

Laura - First of all I didn't know what a theme was. Then I got some help from the kids in high school now. Then when I was reading it, I thought mine stunk compared to everyone else. When I was reading it, I was nervous and shaky.

Bobby - I was near Tony. I was like the third person down. Then I heard you had to tie it together. I had done that, and most people didn't so I felt okay about that.

David - You just think that your theme is real dumb and everything. You wait, and the circle...coming around toward you, and you just...nervous breakdown...I don't know.

Jay - I just felt nervous. And you, that week you just said, "Oh yeah, you have a theme due," and I didn't know what to do. just wrote something. It was so stupid. I felt the way I do now recording this. I stutter and everything, and that's what I did.

Pam W. - Too much hollow grass!*

Craig - First when I read my...before even I read my theme, I was really excited about reading it. But then when the line started coming around, I was real scared. When it got to me, I read, and it was real stinky. But I wanted to learn how to write better so I wouldn't read any rotten themes. Other kids didn't want to read theirs, so I read theirs for them.

---

* Pam is referring to an earlier theme by Jay about attempting to smoke hollow grass as a child.

Ken - I was just hopeful it wouldn't get to me, that it would stop, the person before me.

Patrick - I was so nervous I couldn't even read the paper. I made it all up as I went along.

Tony - At first I was all excited, and I thought my theme was pretty good, but then after I listened for awhile I got more nervous as the line went around. I started truly listening to the themes, and I got real scared that everybody's was better than mine. I felt mine was...I felt mine was stupid.

Linda - I was worried about what to write and how to write it. I got in class, and I was afraid to read because I thought everyone would say, "That's dumb." And then when we had to say comments, I just said what everybody else said, "That's good. I liked it a lot." I was just worried and everything.

Sharon - I was scared. I thought everyone else's was better. I didn't know how to write or say anything.

Cheryl - In the beginning I tried, but I moved back in my chair so no one would see me because I didn't know if I had written a theme or what. I didn't know how to write so I was worried about what everyone would say about what I had written.

Mrs. M. - Anybody want to add, now that each of you has made a comment?

Janet - I didn't understand what the meaning, the purpose of the theme was for...

Keith - Make up a pattern.

Janet - What we were supposed to do with it.

Mrs. M. - You weren't given too many instructions!

(Laughter)

Linda - (to Mrs. M.) Did you ever feel scared when you'd read in front of a new eighth grade class?

Mrs. M. - Yes.

Linda - Even though we'd all write worse than you?

(Laughter)

Mrs. M. - I've taken a lot of writing classes in which I'm not the top at all because I'm not a terribly...I'm much better at reading other people's writing and helping them do better than I am at writing my own, so I never feel very competent about my own writing.

Pam W. - Well when you first said "Write a theme" and I said "What the heck's a theme?" everyone was telling me just write a story. Then you said "Pattern" and I didn't know what to write, so everybody just said "Write what you do," you know what you do in your day. So I wrote a time schedule, and exact minutes, and everything. It couldn't have been true because I didn't leave time to go to the bathroom!

(Laughter)

Dan - I didn't do it the night before so I ended up writing it in other classes, and it really stunk. So I just did it on something general. Nobody got too excited about it, so I got a real letdown.

Mrs. M. - As you look back on it now, should you have been given more instruction before you wrote the first one?

Everyone at once - yeses/noes

Mrs. M. - Whoa, let's get the yeses and the noes, first the yeses. Why?

Scott J. - I think a little because it gives us little things to go by.

David - Yeah, you go "Don't forget your theme Friday." Theme!!!???

Craig - You said, "Just write a pattern." We were just fresh right out of the seventh grade and thought, what the heck is a pattern? I didn't know what it was!

(Laughter)

Bobby - I think we knew what a pattern was, but we couldn't recognize how to write it.

Pam W. - You should have maybe written your theme before and read it to us so we'd have an idea of what a theme was. You should have given us examples.

Mrs. M. - Do you remember that I did steer you to the library and say there were collections of themes published by the students from previous eighth grade classes? Any more yes?... All right, how about the noes?

Jay - No, because you told us. You explained to us that we'd write our first themes. Then you'd tell us what we'd do

wrong. Then we wouldn't do it again. We'd want to fix it.

Pam B. - I think it's better that we thought of our own ideas. If we started depending on *you* to help us out all the time...there are so many patterns if we couldn't think of one when we were writing...

Megan - If you had said a certain kind of pattern for an example, everyone would have done that, and everyone's would be the same.

Craig - This way we had to go cold turkey.

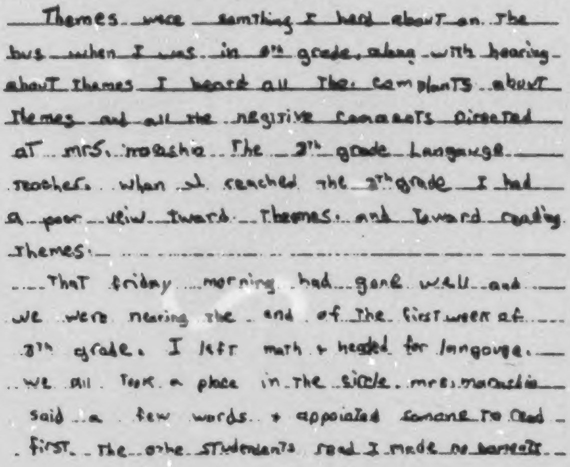
Ken - They're saying you should have told them how to write a theme, but themes have no limitation. You can write a story, a poem, a letter a diary form—anything. They're saying tell 'em! We had to try it!

Scott J. - Look at this! (holding up Ken's current very rough draft)

(Supportive laughter. Everyone talks at once.)

Students looking back at their first theme day agree about the underlying fear and uncertainty but disagree about its causes. I especially value two aspects of their taped conversation: 1) the students are now using their deeper knowledge of writing to explain what was missing that first day, and 2) they recognize that it was necessary to overcome the fear and uncertainty before more positive feelings could emerge.

Room 1 was equally convinced that the feelings of beginning writers should be emphasized to readers of this monograph. Jon Dega includes a theme about the first theme day:



Themes were somthing I herd about on the
bus when I was in 8th grade, along with hearing
about themes I heard all the complants about
themes and all the negitive comments directed
at mrs. macushia the 9th grade Language
teacher. when I reached the 9th grade I had
a poor veiw tward themes. and toward reading
themes.
That friday morning had gone well and
we were nearing the end of the first week of
9th grade. I left math + headed for language.
we all took a place in the sircle. mrs. macushia
said a few words + appointed someone to read
first. the othe studendants read I made no comments

> about there themes. It was nearing my turn
> my heart pounded with fear that my classmates
> wouldent like it. The student next to me read
> I was my turn I picked up my paper and
> and began to read as if a 1000 ears were
> listing. I read through as fast as I could
> and when I finished I sank low in my chair.
> Some one said "Thats definitaly a memory". after
> reading I listend to my classmeits themes very
> intentally nowing how they felt. Jon Degan

Again an emphasis is placed on the bond established among the students through fear and uncertainty. Jon also shows how after he had read aloud that bond changed to one of involvement with his fellow classmates.

Ken Simone and Sean Hanlon use both the remembrances of their classmates and their own summary to show how that involvement has grown:

We had heard about themes since sixth grade, and we were all terrified about the time when we would be writing them. Over the summer of seventh grade we forgot all about them. Then we went back to school, and we relived that fear we had experienced in the lower grades. Then came the first Friday after school started. This was the day most of us feared. We would read our first theme. Most of us hated reading our themes.

Looking back it seems funny how scared we were. Most of us have changed and look forward to theme day. As a class, we have grown a lot through themes. We have grown closer; now we don't get scared if we have a bad theme because we know people are criticizing the theme to help us write better. And we know that nobody will laugh unless it's supposed to be funny. Most of us now feel secure when we read our themes.

2.

When I write my theme, I sometimes catch glimpses of ideas in my mind. I go back to the window, but the idea is usually gone. If I think what I saw was a good idea, I stay at that abstract window. I wait patiently for the idea to reappear. If it doesn't come back to the window, I go on.

If the idea decides to show itself, I study it. I concentrate on it. I look for all its different concepts. My view of it expands. I try to expand it.

When the idea flashes off, I come back out of my mind. As I remember more, the theme builds. I go back to the window and wait for the idea. When it reappears, I write more. Finally the paper has developed as much as I want, so I stop.

As I become more patient, I stay longer at the window. I learn more about the idea I'm writing about. At times when I'm really in a writing mood, I have excellent concentration; the idea comes to the window. My themes are better at these times, but it doesn't always happen.

I am still waiting for the time when the window will open and the idea will come out. Maybe this won't ever happen, but if it does I'll have my best theme.

— Bobby Hamblet

Developing Ideas

Finding and developing ideas, working with content, is a major difficulty for student writers. Alone, a writer faces an empty piece of paper. Lisa Musemeci explains what happens next:

That empty piece of paper just stares at you. Your hand is ready to write, but your mind isn't. A topic hasn't arisen yet, and neither have the ideas that follow it. Sound familiar? Wonder what to do next?

As I sit here wondering what to suggest to you, many problems keep coming up. But let's see how my procedure follows.

In my opinion writer's block is a simple sickness with a simple cure. Let's look at the symptoms. At first you may find yourself thinking too hard. Time's passing by, and you're getting disgusted. You try to rush through your story and notice it isn't as good as you'd like it to be. You try writing something else, but by this time you're totally disgusted and you've got a splitting headache.

Cure? My first problem is sorting out all my ideas, making what I'm trying to say clear to myself as well as to the reader. First of all, sort out your ideas in order so they will have sequence to them. It may be difficult to do, but it is vital if you want your reader to be interested.

At this point you have a bunch of sentences put together that may make sense to you but probably to no one else. You might want to read your story out loud to yourself and see if it really does sound right. If it doesn't make sense or the sentences don't link, make your fixes.

Another thing you may want to ask yourself is if you've got a strong beginning to grasp the attention of the reader. This will certainly make a large difference in a bad or good story. And of course the ending gives the reader his/her final impression of your hard work so you've got to make it strong yet effective.

Finishing up, ask these questions to yourself. Does your story have a strong yet effective beginning and ending to give both first and final impressions? Will the story as a whole grasp the attention of a reader? Does one idea lead sensibly to another? Hopefully, all the questions can be positively answered.

Often such questions can't be answered positively. Scott McGee, facing his second week of inability to get started, chose this process to select ideas:

When I had the topic "link" to write about, I could not think of anything to write about. The previous week I had spent a long time trying to think of something to write about, and I knew if I did the same thing this week, I would not get my work done. I thought and thought and finally thought of a way to get ideas. First I would think if there was anything that has happened to me that I would like to write about, anything I would like people to know, and anything I enjoy. Then I'd write down ideas that came to my head. Then I'd pick out the idea that I'd want to write about. Before I wrote my theme, I did this, and it helped me to get a good idea, and it was something I liked.

The idea Scott liked was based on the past. Chris Pas uses both past and present as idea sources:

I get ideas by looking around me and seeing what things are interesting, like things in nature, a fire, and trees. I sometimes write about things that have happened to me, like about some people I've met, places I've been, and some things that I've done. Once in a while, not often, I write about other people's experiences.

I usually try to jazz up the ideas I get to catch the reader's eye, then to keep the reader interested.

Usually my ideas are very good, when put into the right style, in the right words, and when I put my feelings into them.

To round off use of time Cheryl Yennaco reflects on the present time in the following theme:

I sit here with my paper and pencil trying to think of what to write next. My heart starts pounding because my time to write this is going fast. I jot down different thoughts and ideas out of this mass.

Some of the thoughts that run through my mind are, is what I'm writting about stupid? Or do I know what I'm writting about? What are the people in my class going to think about my writting? Are they going to call this dumb or something? Tomorrow I'm going to have to try to catch the kids in my classes attention and especially my teacher which isn't always easy. Those maybe some of my thoughts but the onesI have to be more conserned about are the ones about this paper. Even if my writting isn't good this time at least I'll have learned something by my mistakes and it will be better the next time.

Chris Ramsden blends his experience with his imagination, so his writing develops as both fact and fiction.

Picking and developing a topic is fairly easy for me although I have my tough points. I write about experiences at the ocean. I live at the ocean in the summer. I take out of my memory things that have happened to me, like the time a small skiff jumped a piece of surf and slammed into my bow. That is something that really happened. I will change the scene and what I was doing so that it is interesting.

It was 6:00 monday morning
I had Just taken my boat, the barracuda (a sleek black pontoonce racing boat) out blue fishing. as I pulled out of the 3-R marina I could just hear the bell of the MR Buoy in the distance. as I emuged from the mouth of the River I blew my horn to a friend of mine, who was sitting on the plum Island Jetty, he waved. wile all of a sudden something hit my bow. it was a large freaker. It was my falt for I forgot to check the cost gaurd warning light to see if there was a rough bar which there was.

when I got out front of flem Island
I noteced the swells were fin, perfect for
flufishing - then I proceded to put my fishing
line out and then I put my foat in ahead
1/4 and opend a can of pepsi.
About 15 minutes later I heard a wezzz
and fumped up and groped my rod. it was
a good 13 pounder he was full of fight but
I tired him out befor he could tire me out
I brought him in about 3' from the faught
and gafed him.
feeing mor confident now I casualy put
that rod out Then Riged another and put
it out and continued drinking my pepsi.
Then it happened...
From out of nowhere shot a 12' ship
it had just jumped a swell and was heading
toward me. I thrugh my boat into revers
But too late. It landed square on my
bow and put a large hole in its
Fiberglass top. I cursed. my gunnahole
was smashed. the ship was swamped
I yelled ~~for~~ her to pull herself up
but I forgot about my fishing lines
I flipped my moter in nutral.
when I was shure the lines wernt caught
in the prop I realed them in and headed
toward the morring where I pulled my
foat out of the water.

epilogue.

it turned out that the girl lost her
licence and her foat wich is still under
watter and I ended up shelling out
$120 for a new gunwale because I had
no enshurance.

When all of that is done, I will usually go over it with a dictionary and put it in proper form. Then many times I have one of my friends go over it to make sure they can follow it.

Ideas develop also from differing uses of the same topic by more than one writer. Chrissy Anderson, Nancy Costa, and Linda Lemanski selected three themes which explain that development:

People have different ideas, even though they are given the same topic to write about. Below are three themes written by three different individuals; the topic was "Decisions."

# 1) SMOKING

At one time in a person's life s/he'll be tempted to smoke. This is my story of my decision.

In the summer of '79 I was helping out with the recreation group for kids. Towards the end everyone else started to smoke, and out of curiosity I tried it and I liked it. After a month I sat down and really thought of all the good points and bad points of smoking. The bad points won. I stopped just like that. I don't really know why I started in the first place. It could have been that I wanted to be part of the group or just because I was scared of being called a chicken. Now I realize I was wrong, and I don't care what other people call me. It is my decision, that I will never touch another cigarette for as long as I live.

# 2 DIVORCE

A decision is a choice you have to make. It may not be what you want but what you think is best for you.

Mary had thought she had everything, until the last couple weeks. Her mother and father fought every day. Mary knew something was going to happen, something she wouldn't like. On Monday it finally happened. Mary could not believe it when she heard it; her mother and father were getting a divorce. Mary's parents said they already talked to the lawyer, and he said that she would have to decide on which one of her parents she would like to stay with. She didn't know which one to choose because she loved them both. Mary remembered how happy the three of them were when they were together and how happy her parents used to be. After Mary decides, it will never be the same.

This is the biggest decision Mary will ever have to make in her life.

# 3 LOVE AND WANT

This year I was approached by a large decision. My neighbor got a new thirteen hands high gelding. The daughter couldn't handle it or control it. I had Misty at this time and was outgrowing her. I liked the *gelding a lot because I was the only one paying attention to him. I asked my father if we could consider trading ponies because the neighbors were selling it anyway. My father said to think if I really wanted to trade Misty. I thought about it and I knew I could take care of the gelding, ride him, and do the best for him. I told my dad, and he said if that was what I really wanted. My father went over to our neighbor's house and asked, but they wanted to sell for money and didn't want to sell or trade for another pony. I was kinda glad because I didn't think about how much I really loved Misty, so I didn't want to choose between something I loved and something I wanted.*

Comments:

Theme #1 - SMOKING

This theme shows what may come up in a person's life. It explains what may happen and how other people can solve these problems. The person who wrote this theme arrived at her decision by thinking of a decision almost every other kid would have to make; it would have to be a decision that she went through like smoking. At the time she was in a sharing mood, to share her experience and feelings with other people.

Theme #2 - DIVORCE

This theme on divorce shows how hard it is to choose between the two people you love, without hurting the other person. She got her idea from a book she was reading while the topic "Decisions" came up. In her mood she wanted to leave people wondering what they'd do in that situation.

Theme #3 - LOVE AND WANT

This theme shows how hard it is to choose between something you like and something you want. She got her idea by thinking of an experience she went through; she did this so she could relate it better than a made up story. She was in a serious mood when she wrote the theme.

As you read this section, you can realize how three totally different individuals have different ideas about the same topic.

The ways theme ideas are developed may be influenced by preferences within the class. Vinny Froio, Mary McPhillips, and Gina Letizio use their class as example:

In our group we like themes to be interesting and detailed. They must be detailed so that the listeners and readers will willingly involve themselves. We also like suspense that builds up to an exciting, action-packed ending. Since we want to give an idea of what the average eighth graders at Windham Center School like in themes, we asked

them. The majority of the boys enjoy science fiction and adventures, while the majority of the girls like "emotional," humorous, and science fiction themes.

For science fiction themes there's a certain topic that almost everybody writes about called the Kulubians. They are strange aliens who live in outer space. The following is a Kulubian theme by Vincent Froio about the Kulubians invading Africa.

Return To Africa

The Kulubians had been chasing David, Steve, and Brian through the scary Jungle. After a few miles they came to a beach were they found a broken down rowboat. They escaped in it, but not for long. The Kulubians radioed to their base for help. Kulubians chased them with their high powered spaceships. They rowed viciously, but they were no match for the Kulubian's spaceships.

A guy came by in his nuclear powered spaceship. They jumped in, as the spaceship blasted off. The guy said he was a spy from the U.S.A., and he was spying on the evil Kulubians. He shot some ships with his stunnay and blasters, but not even his accurate shooting could hold off the Kulubian squad. He put the spaceship in a warp, and they escaped.

They finally got to the U.S.A. where they would be safe. They were scolded by their parents for going to Africa. They wanted to go back to get their friends, so they could burry them in the U.S.A. Their parents wouldn't let them, but they decided to anyway.

They asked Mr. Manna (a science teacher) to make them a spaceship, after they explained the situation. They wanted to get there quick, so the bodies wouldn't perish. Mr. Manna built a ship with the help of his builders and his giant laboratory. The next day they blasted off.

They landed in Kulubian territory undetected. Steve and Brian got Vinny, Blink, and Jason, while David put a time bomb in one of the many Kulubian buildings. The ship was in the air with them in it, when suddenly there was a big explosion. (ka boom, ka boom, ka boom) They got to the U.S.A. safely.

They were about to bury Vinny, Jason, and Blink when Mr. Manna told Steve, Brian, and David to bring them into his laboratory. Mr. Manna had invented a machine which could bring people back to life. It was untested, and Mr. Manna wasn't sure if it would work. Mr. Manna tried the machine on them. Vinny and Blink made it. There was no hope for Jason, but there never was anyway. They all went and buried Jason. They all swore to get the Kulubians back for what they had done.

Along with the Kulubian themes we also have many serious themes to bring us back to reality. The serious themes range from love stories to fictional suicide stories. Here is a love story in which you will see the depth needed for a well-written theme.

I'll never forget that hot July morning
When he called to say goodbye,
I sat staring at the wall wondering-
why today, why?!..

I told him I'd be there at nine,
But he said make it eight.
I asked him "why so early?"
He said he didn't want to be late....

Late for the journey.
The journey he didn't want to take.
Living down south was a move
he didn't want to make.

I met him that morning by his house.
Their car packed and ready to go.
As we stood and looked at eachother.
Our shyness started to show.

He looked down and said he'd write.
I told him not to forget.
It was then his father came over to me,
And said, "haven't we met?".

I introduced myself politely
And tried to edge away.
Oh how I wished I had never
gotten up that day!

His father talked to me for quite a while,
While the son walked down the road.
I couldn't concentrate on what his father said
Only the way the son strode.

His father said, "nice meeting you".
As he walked up to his car.
I asked him where the son was;
He said he couldn't have gone too far.

It was then, when I turned around
And saw him standing there.
I wanted to tell him how I felt,
But I didn't even dare.

The time had come for him to leave,
For us to say goodbye.
I tried, though it was very hard,
Not to break down and cry.

He said goodbye and walked to the car.
It killed me to know he'd be living
so far.

I pulled myself together
And tried to wish him good luck.
I opened my mouth,
But the words seemed to be stuck.

Everything was in the car,
Packed and ready to go.
It was just about then my tears
started to flow.

That hot July morning
I'll never forget,
And the time we shared
I'll never regret.

—Gina Letizio

The main point we are trying to get across in this section is that perfect themes don't come overnight. We also want to say that just because you might think that your writings are horrible, somebody might like them! Good writing takes a lot of thought, patience, creativity, and last but not least... ***Practice!*** **Here is a theme by a girl in our class who tells how she became a better writer:**

The way I learned to become a better writer was to practice. My first themes had no structure and were boring. What accounted for this was that I hadn't written much, I didn't know where my weaknesses were. As I practiced more my themes became better, but this didn't happen overnight. Each week they improved a little bit and are and always will continue to improve.

By Mary McPhillips

Improvement is obvious to the student writers. According to Alyssa Arrigo, **through our eighth grade year we as students have learned to develop our idea span by practicing our writing weekly. We find ourselves not having to use topics given by Mrs. Marashio as much as when we started. Most of us come up with our own creative ideas used in our composition writing.**

Many people in fact would like to know how we get our brilliant ideas. We have surveyed and found that lots of students get their ideas from outside sources, such as watching television, from a conversation, or even a certain incident.

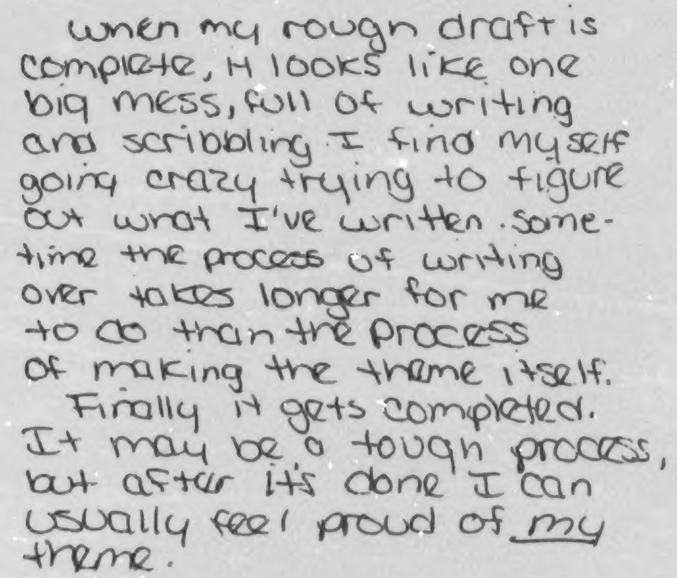
Kathy Kerton explains how she improved:

when I try to write a theme, I usually like to first off find a nice peaceful place where I can consentrate. I've found that my brain works best when my surroundings are pretty quiet. Next, I try to think up an exciting theme. Sometimes, nothing comes into mind. when this happens, I've found it best for me to look through magazines, usually in the advice columns.

I've found that when I do a theme on someone with a problem like drinking, I do better on it. I don't know why; maybe its because I read and hear about peoples' problems daily.

When I finally get my subject, I start to jot down what I want to put into my theme. That part isn't too hard, ~~to~~ but when I have to put it all together so it make a good theme, it's pretty tough for me.

I find myself writing an then scribbling out over and over. Sometimes, I find it hard to get one part to fit, so I call a friend. Usually she can help me solve the problem after I read what I have to her. After the problem is solved, she helps me fix other things she doesn't thint are correct. I don't know why her way usually ends up being right; maybe it's because her thoughts differ from mine.



when my rough draft is complete, it looks like one big mess, full of writing and scribbling I find myself going crazy trying to figure out what I've written. sometime the process of writing over takes longer for me to do than the process of making the theme itself.

Finally it gets completed. It may be a tough process, but after it's done I can usually feel proud of my theme.

Karen Cizmadia ends this chapter with an explanation of how she has improved and then shares two themes, the first about how she wrote her best theme, the second that best theme itself.

I find writing can be hard to do at first but can get easier once I start.

It is hard for me to think of an idea to write about when my mind is on something other than writing. So, the first thing I do before I start to write is clear my mind of anything that doesn't have to do with writing. The next thing I do is think about an idea or topic to write about. One way I can get an idea is to think about things that we've talked about in school, like when my Reading teacher was talking about child abuse, my next theme was about a case of child abuse. Another way I think of an idea is from current events in the news. When I was reading the newspaper on the hostages and the attempt made to try to save them, my theme for that week was about the ordeal of the wife of one of the men who was part of the attempt.

After getting the idea, I think about how I should write it, how I should form the piece. If I write something having myself as a character (using the pronoun I), I always put myself in that character's place. I write how I think that character would act and/or feel in the particular setting. Another thing I do is put myself in the other characters' places.

When I begin to write, I try to make sentences clear to the reader. I use as few "ands" as possible. I try to use correct grammar. I write in paragraphs. One of the most important things I try to do when I'm writing is make a connection between the first sentence and the last sentence in the piece. I use the word "try" because I can't always do these things.

I find writing especially hard when I'm not in the mood, but once I clear my mind of any distractions, I find it easier to write.

After coming home Wednesday from school, I took off my coat, threw it on the rocking chair, and ran straight upstairs to my room to do my homework.

After fluffing my pillow on the chair, I sat down comfortabley. I reached down into my school bag at my side and pulled out my math book and a piece of paper. After fumbling through my drawer for a pencil, I began to do the math. When I finished, I looked down at my bag. Seeing all of those books, I thought to myself, I'm never going to finish.

I put my math away and got out my social studies. As I was doing the questions in the book, I realized that I was sick of doing social studies- I was in the mood to write my theme.

I got out of my chair and walked over to my red beanbag chair. After kicking it, punching it, and throwing it up in the air once, I sat down. I wiggled around for a few seconds until I was perfectly comfortable. Then I thought. I thought about a topic for my theme I would really enjoy writing about. I looked around my room until I spotted my green afghan on my bed, all rolled up in a bundle. Glaring at the afghan, I remembered some old memories about my great-grandmother and watching her knit parts of it.

Hey, I thought to myself, why not write a short story about the afghan and how much it means to me?

I got out of the beanbag chair and once again sat in my other chair at my desk.

I thought about how I would write it. I decided to write it as a sort of letter to my great-grandmother.

I picked up my pencil. Just as I was going to write, I realized that it was dark and I needed the light on. What time is it?, I asked myself. Looking at the clock near my bed, it read 5:00. I realized that I had spent over an hour and a half thinking of a topic for my theme.

For another hour and a half, I wrote, thought, crossed out, erased, and finally gave myself writer's cramp. "I finally finished," I said aloud to myself.

I sat back in my chair and shook my hands around. Then I began to read the theme. After adding arrows and crossing out more words, I thought the theme seemed a little bit like something Sara Chulack would write. It was extremely detailed and gave a clear view of the setting. It was also kind of touching and very meaningful.

By the time I recopied it, the time was 7:00. I was starving and realized that I had a lot more homework to do.

As I left my room and started walking down the stairs, I thought, I think this is my best theme I've done all year.

Theme #22

I can remember going to your house and watching you knit the shades of green yarn into squares. Your skinny, boney fingers would tremble as you knocked the long knitting needles together to get each stitch so perfect. Your head would bend, and your eyes would hardly ever move as you looked through your thick bifocals. I can remember you humming sweet little tunes you had sung to me as a baby, as you rocked your cherry, colonial rocker back and forth keeping a steady beat with the creaking of the old wooden floor. I can remember after every knitted square, we would go into the barn-board paneled kitchen to drink some herb tea which you had made yourself. After we had drunk our tea, I would help you walk back into the small, pine scented room. As soon as you were sitting comfortably in your rocker, you'd say nothing and start knitting and humming as you had before our tea.

About half an hour later you'd say to me. "Karen, poke the fire." I would, because even though not much heat was produced, I knew that you loved the scent to flow through the house, giving it the clean, fresh, pine outdoor smell.

For 1½ hr each day, that would be the only thing you would say to me. Your mind was determined to make your shaky hands work, even when the pain hurt awfully.

After my wonderful week long visit with you, you still hadn't finished your project. I can remember you saying to me. "It will be harder to finish it without you, but it will be done, soon."

Five months later, I went to visit you again. When I arrived, you sat in your rocker and told me to sit on the braided rug on the floor in front of the fire. The house still had the same pleasant pine scent as it had five months ago.

Beside you rested a large, brown paper bag. You reached your small, shaky arm into the bag. "It's done," you said as you pulled out a beautiful green shaded afghan

As you handed it to me, you said, "I'm getting too old and tired to knit. It used to only take a few weeks to finish an afghan, but this one took over five months to finish. This afghan is the last I shall ever knit. It means something very special for you to have it."

I can remember that night snuggling up to the warm afghan as the cool air snuck through the small cracks in the boarded walls.

I never really knew how to thank you for the gift that is so special to me, so I hope by reading this theme that you remember some beautiful memories we had together and my message to you, thank you.

3.

What is writing but a window to our mind
With style variation of every kind?
Closer and closer you move toward the sill.
How fast you move is your own free will.
But older you get; wiser you grow.
The window expands, and the image will show.
"How?" you may ask. That answer I can't find
For every one of us has our own window to our mind.

— Chris Lebiecki

Structuring

According to Richard Ross, the way you structure a theme or story can determine overall how the story comes out. It is how your story moves along and how you piece your ideas together that tell if it has any structure or form. For instance, a good story with good structure starts with a good beginning. A good beginning introduces the idea which you will develop throughout the story. The first sentence should show where, what, why, and how the event takes place in the story. From then on you should bring your idea along and add the needed descriptions of people, places, time, or things. You should give descriptions of the action that takes place. The end of the story should tie in with the beginning of the story, finishing the idea.

More specifically Kim Spofford and Shellie Costello suggest, when structuring a theme, you first get an idea of what you would like to write about. For example you might choose a link or a childhood keepsake. Then think about your idea and put it down on paper, making sort of a list:

Idea - Childhood Keepsake
1. flashbacks
2. show feeling
3. show a lot of action

After that, work your idea through, putting it in order with good form and content. When you come to the end, make sure it makes sense with the beginning. After that, work your idea; using the same list as your guide, go back and make sure you put in all that you wanted to and that you used good punctuation.

Rewrite it for your final draft. Read it over for errors. If there are none, then you are done. You wrote a good theme using a good structure to do so.

Actually, structuring is a kind of building, a fitting together of parts. For students the building comes about through content as well as form. David Cunningham provides this example:

An important part in writing is being able to build a theme from the beginning to the climax, going from minor to major. Using intense and descriptive words to bring up suspense makes your theme of better

quality. Here is a short theme to show this building action:

> *The boy slowly skated out onto the lake. The air was still, and no one was in sight. He had an eerie feeling in his stomach, as though something might go wrong.*
>
> *He had just gotten to the middle when he heard a loud crack. Terror built inside him as he stood motionless on the thin ice. In an effort to head back to shore, he took one step forward. Suddenly the ice opened underneath him. He kicked and fought for air as the freezing water engulfed him.*
>
> *A surge of panic shot through him as he turned and twisted helplessly in the cold darkness. Looking for the hole, he noticed a heavy pain in his chest due to lack of air. Screaming in the silent water the boy fights for his life....*

Notice the intense and descriptive words used to show suspense and to build an important part of the theme. Other important ideas or details can be used to build to the climax of hate, danger, joy, etc. By using this building action of suspense the writer will easily catch the reader's attention.

Catching the reader's attention is not enough, though; holding attention is equally important. Natalie Shattuck, Linda Gile, Kellie Saunders, Maureen Ciardello, and Krisy Porter believe that readers need to feel that writers care about fixing errors and producing well-structured work. These students used their class to provide a list of what students actually do to fix their writing.

How do you fix your errors? These are the results of a survey we took from some of our fellow classmates.

K.P. - I read my paper over; then I use a dictionary if I find any mistakes. I also let other people read it for their opinions.

S.P. - I write my paper; then I cross out what I don't like.

J.D. - I write my thoughts down first. Then I pick out the thoughts I want to write about.

T.B. - I use my Papermate Eraser Mate pen, and when I make a mistake, I erase it.

K.D. - I write in pencil so I can erase my errors, which is very seldom.

S.B. - I read my themes over to see if there are any mechanical errors.

D.D. - I use a dictionary to find the correct spelling of a word or how it is used.

M.C. - I read it over, and if it doesn't make any sense I look to find

the right words.

N.S. - **I read over my themes to see if there are any errors, and if there are, I fix them.**

L.G. - **I have someone help me find my mistakes.**

K.S. - **I have someone else read it because when you read it yourself, you read what you want it to say.**

Do the ways that you fix your mistakes match these?

When you're fixing a paper, do you use resources, or do you just guess? Instead of guessing, you could use resources such as these we have listed:

- **a Thesaurus, which gives you more than one of the same meanings for each word in the book;**
- **a Spellex, for it has singular, plural, past and present, and different spellings for many words;**
- **a dictionary for words because it gives the spelling, definition, etymology, pronunciation, and the part of speech of all words;**
- **a dictionary for synonyms and antonyms which gives both synonyms (like meanings) and antonyms (unlike, opposite meanings) for many words:**
- **an encyclopedia which gives a lot of knowledge for many words.**

Sometimes your best bet is not your mind but maybe the resources that we listed.

In structuring a theme students are concerned not only about the writing and the readers, but student writers are also developing their own standards. Brian Lafferty explains his writing focus:

I write the way I write for a very specific reason, that reason being that I feel that dealing with topics that are dramatized in stories like love stories, cop stories, adventure stories, etc. are a waste of time because that type of story has no effect on anything to do with real things. Personally I feel that writings of two kinds are important because they have an effect on real things. Those two kinds are comical stories and stories that criticize (constructively) things dealing with real life.

Comical stories are significant because they give the reader "a mood boost" which would give the reader a short period of pleasant thoughts or actions, thus effecting the reader's life in a positive way.

Criticizing writings are significant because they may inspire positive changes for both present and future circumstances.

I also feel that this approach works for me and may not work for

you, or it may work for you but you feel it could work better if you change it. It is most likely that someone else's method will work for you only if you edit and/or change it.

The following is a selected theme of my own. Numbers have been placed according to the expected requirements for a 4 theme in our class.

1. **Beginnings catch reader's attention / make want to read more**
2. **Endings tie together /sum up**
3. **Has a lot of thought put in**
4. **Many descriptive details**
5. **Has well planned steps / sequence**
6. **Expresses idea fully and completely**
7. **Refined idea**
8. **No mistakes**

Stress

You are a twentyfirst century airplane
pilot, yet you have never actually been in 1
the cockpit of a plane, because planes no longer
have cockpits they are controlled from the ground.
Each plane carries 1250 passengers (No standees).
Each plane has a swimming pool, and a sauna they
also have 8 bars along with 125 robot 4
stewardesses. 5
Your job consists of the highly technical
tasks of pushing buttons, flicking switches, and
talking with the electronic cruise control computer
on board the plane
You are a nervous wreck, the stress is
tremendous, you have the lives of 1250 passengers
in your hands, and you are not in the least
bit of danger. Your spouse ~~is not in the least~~
hates your job and is always asking you
4 to quit, your barely even around your kids, 6
so little that you have trouble remember- 7
ing their names. You smoke as if you're
on death road, and you drink like a fish in
a bottle of Gin. Your hair is turning
grey way to fast and you practically have to
screw on your hat. You drive like a maniac

4 (Eight tickets a week is nothing & to be
proud of!) Your house is falling apart and
your always sleeping. But you don't have
time to do these things. Your starting to 6
hate yourself, but fortunatly your smart
2 enough to realize that that one little sense
of guilt is screwing up your whole life and
your going to do something about!

Pete Bolin tries from another angle with his "try scale":

I base my writing on a scale. I call this scale my try scale. I base my try scale on these tries.

1. **I try to write on the subject given every week.**
2. **I try to put my ideas together.**
3. **I try to write things that interest me while staying in the boundaries of the subject given.**
4. **I try to make my themes a little funny.**
5. **I try to make a 4 theme, but that isn't always so.**
6. **I try to use my try scale.**

I made this scale to model the way I write themes. Those tries are how I model myself. I use this try scale most of the time.

I picture myself as someone who tries to write well. I see myself as one who is always trying to find something new to write about. Although I find a good subject like Kulubians, I stay with it only until I get bored. I see myself as a stubborn writer. I feel I should write what comes natural. I feel this is stubborn because I think some rewriting is an alteration of the natural forces acting in my brain. But I still go back to the fact I try.

Carol Wentworth insists that part of the process of writing is that need to keep trying:

Growing as a writer takes a lot of time, aggravation, and discouragement. You can't just write a perfect theme and expect to write perfect themes from then on. You've got to expect to get bad themes now and then no matter how many times you redo them. But don't give up on what you do. Writing, copying, crossing out, and ripping up are all a part of improving your themes. On theme day when you finish reading, your fellow students will tell how good or bad it is, tell if it's clear or sequencing the idea. By fixing each theme you improve yourself by being alert for mistakes of idea etc. It still might not come out perfect, but at least you try.

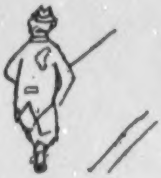
As student writers keep trying, they discover new sources for working out the structuring of their writing. Scott Johnson explains how illustrations affect the writing process. Then he and several others share illustrations and the themes they relate to.

Illustrations are important in many types of writing. Before a written language was invented, many civilizations used to inscribe pictures on cave walls.

An illustration could even tell a story by itself. When I was writing a theme one Thursday afternoon, I took a good look at it and read it over a few times. The theme was a picture in words of a man. After reading the theme I had an incredible urge to draw a picture of the man who was now flashing on and off in my mind. After I drew the picture, I copied it on the final draft of my theme. I realized how blank my theme was without my picture, and for the first time I realized how important pictures are to writing. Of course I'm not saying to go around drawing on all of your themes, but maybe think of all the pictures and symbols that you see on signs, buttons, books, and so forth. Illustrations can be important.

The Man (1980)

The man walks up and down the street. Once he walks up, and only once does he walk back. He walks slowly, very slowly for he has from morning to the fall of night to walk, to waste. He owns nothing but the clothes on his back and a very old house on the hill. He lives alone with not even a small dog to pass the time. His shoes barely hold together; one sock on his right foot, his right foot because his left one is patching the shoulder of his buttonless over coat. This man does not speak; there is not even the slightest expression on his face, "only" silence, total silence. The man is one of the past; his time has come and vanished, never to return. He walks up and down the street, staring at the ground, waiting for the end.

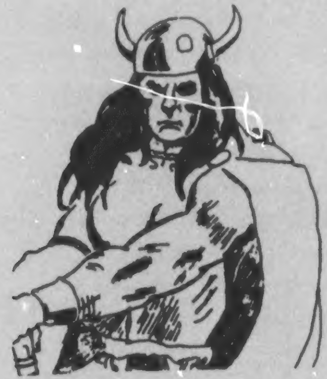


SAFE

Balder

They had been in the matrix for a day now and they were all very hungry and tired. Terons stomach growled with emptyness, as they walked on throught the dark corridors. After rounding the next bend they saw light, and quickened thier pace. When they got to the corridors brightly lit exit they walked into the gigantic cavern that was as bright as day. A happy look came over thier faces as they walked further into the cavern. It was like a jungle, thick follyage covered the whole cavern which stretched farther than the eye could see. The light seemed to be coming from the huge arch of the cavern thousands of feet up. Star began to tell clay that they were probably under an ocean where the sun could show through an unbelievably strong and transparent bottom. Soon they found a nice spot by a pond to camp for the night. In a little while Teron and clay had made a cozy lean-two for shelter during the night. The air was filled with the sounds of wild animils so clay set out to get enough food for all of them, espesailly Teron with his savage apetite. Clay had decided to travel

above ground so he swung his bow over his shoulder and jumped up into the dense foliage above.



He hadn't been up in the trees for more than 5 minutes before the faint spore of a large buck had been sensed by his complex sense of smell. He crept silently through the trees following the sent which become stronger at his every advancement. Soon he could see the buck. It was huge enough for at least two hearty meals. Clay's muscles grew tense as he silently pulled the deadly laser arrow out of his quiver. The buck could not sense the danger lurking above it just stood there unaware of what the next second could bring. Clay rested the arrow on the arrow rest, pulled the nock tight up against the string, he pulled the arrow back fully, took presice aim and fired. The arrow humed as it flew through the air at speeds over imagination. The giant buck leaped but the arrow sunk firm into the beasts chest throwing the buck off balance. The arrow had fond its mark and the buck landed with a thud now a lifeless mound of bone and flesh. Clay whistled and in a little while Teron came stomping through the dence under brush. Clay told him to bring the carcase back to thier shelter where they would eat. So Teron picked it up flung it over his masive shoulder and ran back through the under brush towards the shelter. Clay wiped of his arrow which had now lost its lazer charge and placed it securly back in his quiver to be recharged.

Back at camp they ate the fresh tender meat of the buck, it tasted good to them and they ate thier fill except Teton who ate the rest of the huge animal. After they ate they all sat and talked about wheather to stay for a while or not. The decision was unanimous they decided to stay for one more day and than journey on through the jungle. Soon they got tired and got ready to go to sleep.

To be contiued.

Todd Baker

Losing

I'm losing my grandfather. He is dying of a malignant tumor of the brain. Last summer he had brain surgery. The doctors could only get ninety percent of the tumor out. The doctors said he only had three months to live, and that the tumor would grow back in six months. He has made it through three months already, hopefuly he'll make it through the months to come. The loss of my grandfather would mean alot to me. He is the only grandfather I've got left.

Bill Morgan

Attempted Murder

I was walking down the road one misting night,
All I Know there was noone in sight.

Then I heard some footsteps someplace,
they started picking up to almost a running pace.

I slowed right down to see who it was,
then my mind went to a buzz.

I woke up in the morning at someones front door,
I rubbed my forehead and guessed I got hit by a 2x4.

I barely got up because of the blow,
I made up my mind I'd Kill my foe.

I walked home and waited until night,
I made sure there was nobody in sight.

I went to the same spot where I was before,
I turned around and sam a man run out a door.

I had an erge to turn back around,
without a dought I heard the same sound.

Right behind me I could hear the pebbles grind,
then, right then, I had to use my mind.

He put his hands around my neck,
I hit the deck.

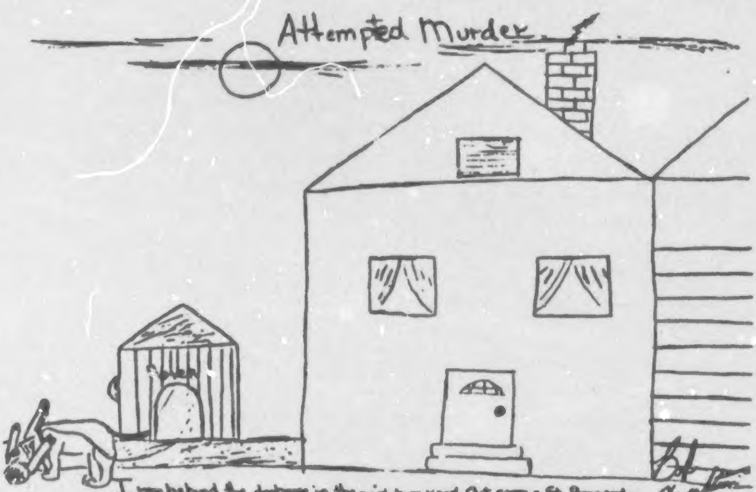
He rolled over and over,
He stood to his feet and picked up a boulder.

He threw it fast right at my head,
when it hit me it felt like lead.

I had just gotten up, he threw a punch,
I felt my jaw go crunch.

I didn't appreciate it, not one bit,
I hit him wildly, he took a fit.

I ran behind the doghouse in my neighbor's yard,
out came a St. Bernard.



Attempted Murder

I ran behind the doghouse in the neighbors yard. Out came a St. Bernard.

The dog was biting him to smitheriens,
slashing his teeth through the guys faded jeans.

The man tried to get up to run away,
I guess it wasn't his lucky day.

He tumbled and tripped to the ground,
Sort of making a whimpering sound.

I walked over to him, hit him in the face,
I ran into a house then called the police.

The cops came to pick him up,
I could hear him cry like a new-born pup.

I walked home rubbing the bumps on my head,
I got into the house and then went to bed.

Bob Hazelton

The Balloon

Rebeckie's dream to see a parade with clown floats and fun had come true. She got there with her mother as the parade began. Standing in the back she couldn't see so she managed to crawl her way to the front. She sat on the curb and saw a large truck going by with all the "Peanut" characters on it. She waved, but they didn't see her.

Then the clowns came. Some were happy, some sad, some fat & tall. Rebeckie found the one she liked best, he was wearing big floppy shoes, with a large smile and had no hair at the top of his head but that wasn't what caught her eye. It was his huge bundle of balloons each with a clown face on it. He was giving them away and she had to get one. She also waved to him but was unseen for a second time. Determined to get one, she followed him up the street. The clown stopped to give his hand outs. She ran up to him and pulled at his baggy pants. He turned around and saw Rebeckie; he gave her a balloon. Not the one that she wanted but this was good enough for her.

She followed the clown up the street a little further. She got tired so she sat back on an unfamiliar curb and watched the rest of the parade in full glory.

After the parade had gone by and the people started into the street to get their cars, Rebeckie couldn't find her mother. She stood so alone, yet hundreds of people were around her. She was pushed around, and cursed at. She sat in tears until the street cleared and she saw the shadowed figure of her mother just down the street.

She got up and ran, the breeze drying her tears. Rebeckia in such a joy rose and hugged her mother. In all the excitement her prize possession her balloon slipped out of her hand. She let go of her mother an stood watching the balloon float up higher & higher. It was free now. And Rebeckia stood in silence until the balloon faded away

Janet Mcootrain

Ken Champagne reverses the process, using words to better understand a picture:

Birth of Spring

Pictures can mean so much more than what you intended them to be. For example I took a picture of a pussy-willow branch. just for the sake of taking a picture. After development, it looked like a so-called "artistic" picture. I entered it in a photography contest and won. This was back in '78. I didn't know why I won, because I thought it was a dumb picture.

But as I look at it now three years later, I can see a couple of different stories in it. Now that I under stand it, I can see a very peaceful place. It's so peaceful sitting their all by itself without anyone or thing disturbing it. It only looks peaceful now thow when I leave, a wind, animal or other person may kill it.

But the main story I see is exactly what the title calls it, "Birth of Spring". It shows spring being reborn when the bud comes out for a new year, just like it did last year and the year before. At the end of the season it will die, but each year it will come back to life over and over again.

I think if a person looks even harder at a picture, he or she can see more of what was actually meant from the beginning

And Bobby Hamblet shows another kind of reversal, writing better because of what did *not* work:

> **A lot of the writing projects that teachers have used on me haven't worked. One of them that we did this year worked for a lot of people but not for me.**
>
> **The theme topic that week was "Childhood Keepsake" which I thought was dumb. Then the teacher told us to bring in a child's keepsake so we could work on it in class. I figured no one would bring a stuffed animal in and show it to the class.**
>
> **Sure enough, lots of kids brought in stuffed animals. In the end I was the embarrassed one. The next day I brought in a stuffed animal and showed it to the class.**
>
> **Then the bad stuff began. We had to quickly write five good sentences describing the keepsake. I thought it was so dumb. I couldn't figure out how it would help me. Then being stubborn as I was, I got stuck. I couldn't figure anything out. Mrs. Marashio tried to help, but I couldn't figure out something so simple it was pitiful. Later we had to make a rough draft using some of the sentences we wrote earlier. Then we had to tear and build* in order to make it better. I couldn't even do this! I was stupid, stubborn, and angry at Mrs. Marashio. I thought that she was giving us such a dumb assignment.**
>
> **Finally when I wrote my theme (which I didn't even like), I didn't use any of the steps Mrs. Marashio gave us. I just wrote it without feeling or anything.**
>
> **Even though I liked it more when I read it, it turned out bad. I was told it wasn't focused and I didn't show feeling in it or details which could make it better. That theme taught me to listen to people and ideas that can help my themes.**

The real key to eighth grade writing success is that students don't give up. They've learned that writing is complicated and they can't know it all at once, so they simply try to improve. Jana White explains her progress to show how improvement comes one step at a time:

> **To write a theme I think about topics that people will be interested in and I will be able to describe and that will get people's attention.**

---

* see pp. 27-28.

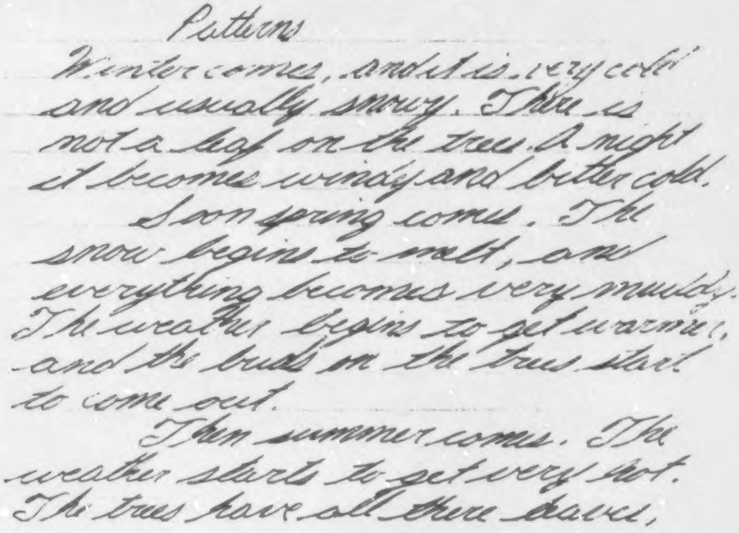
I write my ideas on paper and say to myself, does this go along with my topic? If it doesn't, I start all over again.

I try very hard to write 4 themes on topics I'm interested in. I get ideas from other kids in my class from hearing their themes which gives me ideas for my next one. I listen to the details in them and the comments made.

What made me write better in my themes and other assignments was to follow what comments [by student readers] **were written down on my papers, for example, "begins the point but not completed," or "Is this a strong enough beginning?" or "use different words so effect isn't weakened." I use more details so that people stay interested and so my themes sound more expertly written. I know that I have improved, and I hope to improve more by the end of the year. I'll continue to use details, for example, "She completed a quick, accurate pass" and "Frederick sliced the top of his boiled egg and gazed absently into its depths." I hope by the end of the year I'll go from a 3 theme to a 4.**

The Accelerated class grouped to present a summary of changes in their learning about structuring writing. Ken Champagne compiled the following result of the group's work:

After surveying all of the people in our group, we found some very common patterns about how we learned to structure our writing. For example, everybody in our group except two said that they originally lacked detail. This theme shows that early lack:



Patterns

Winter comes, and it is very cold and usually snowy. There is not a leaf on the trees. At night it becomes windy and bitter cold.

Soon spring comes. The snow begins to melt, and everything becomes very muddy. The weather begins to get warmer, and the buds on the trees start to come out.

Then summer comes. The weather starts to get very hot. The trees have all there leaves, and the flowers are all blooming. School is out and many people are on vacation.

The next thing you know its fall. The leaves begin changing. Kids go back to school, and the weather becomes cold. Then pattern starts all over

Jay Shattuck

That theme was an example of our first theme.

But now people write with all of the detail you could want, as this theme shows:

Mrs. Gordon couldn't sleep She kept having night mares of how mean she had been to her young son, Jeff. Two weeks before Jeff had been sent to the mental hospital because he had schizophrenia Ever since, Mrs. Gordon had hardly slept in peace. Every night she had the same night mare. her sitting on the living room couch able to hear Sarah in the shower, getting ready for her junior prom. She was reading "How to handle a problem child." Jeff had wandered into the room, eating a jelly sandwich. and saw the book she was reading.

She hadn't even known he was there until the peace was broken with him screaming at her "I'm NOT A PROBLEM CHILD!" She paid no attention to him, and he went running upstairs muttering something under his breath. A few minutes later she heard Sarah screaming at Jeff, "You little bastard!" I hate you! You ruin everything for me! What have I ever done to you?!" Mrs. Gordon went running upstairs to see Sarah's beatiful prom dress covered with Jeff's jelly sandwich! After she had calmed dow Sarah, who was absolutly hysterical, she went after Jeff who had been standing there laughing like a witch. She chased him all over the house for about five minutes until she got cornered. She went toward him saying "I'm finally getting you back, you little devil you. I'm finally going to get you back. You go around making our lives miserable and never stop to think that eventually we *will* get you back!"

She laughed at the sight of him crouching in the corner crying "Please Ma, dont beat me. I dont want to do all those mean things. Please dont beat me?"

She grabbed him up and ripped off his pants. She raised her hand up high and came down hard on his bare rearend. With that she woke up screaming. I'm sorry Jeff, please come back. I wont do it again! I promise!"

Megan Arthur

Another problem we had was tying beginnings and endings together. At first when Mrs. Marashio showed us how to do this, nobody knew what she was talking about. They simply wrote and then stopped.

Time is...

Some people think that time is too precious to be wasted, other people will spend it like water. For one time is wasted when I try to do my homework in front of the T.V., but it is also wasted when it is absolutly quiet. I think my homework time is used well when I do my homework with the radio on

Different people think of time differently, some people think of it as how much money they can make in one day, some people think of it as another day to sit at home and do nothing again.

Right now my question is what time is it going to be when I finish this theme... now my answer is right now.

Myron Arthur

Now just about everybody knows how to make the connections, and now beginnings and endings don't seem hard to do. An example is:

> *It was a very warm and sunny day. The sky was a beautiful light blue, with a few fluffy clouds scattered around. I wondered how great it would be if you could just jump up into the sky and land softly into one of those fluffy clouds. Then I snapped out of my daze and decided to go for a walk. After all it was a beautiful day.*
>
> — Nancy

A third thing that has changed greatly from the beginning of the year until now is weeding, adding, and depth, though these are things people still have trouble doing. It's funny because Mrs. Marashio still writes about weeding this and that, just to give us that little extra push to make it close if not perfect. That process of taking out unnecessary words, phrases, and statements results in themes like the following one:

Improvement

There are four things that have helped me improve my writing. The first one is criticism. Telling me what I have done wrong, where my weaknesses are and why it is wrong will help.

The second is listening to others themes or pieces of writing. Picking out what is good in it learning from someone elses mistakes, then some of their ideas may help me in my future writing.

The third is compliments. When someone tells me I have done well, I try to impress them and myself by doing better.

The fourth is this. I had to set a goal, a commitment, when I came to this class. To become a better writer is a goal that I must strive for.

With these four ways I hope to and have improved my writing.

Janet Sharbaum

A lot of us worry about having trouble catching the reader's or listener's attention. Face it, after listening to themes for fifty minutes, a listener could get tired and not pay attention, so catching attention is very important. You could have a good idea, but if you don't make it strong, you're going to lose your audience and the idea. But if you do keep it strong, you could make a potentially boring theme into a tropical paradise:

Dangerously Drunk

Ron picked me up at my house. We knew where we were going but we just didn't want to say it. When we got to the park, we met the gang. (I didn't like them but I stayed with them to be with Ron).

We all got in Joe's van. We waited for Al who was bringing the booze. When he got their we started passing alound the Scotch and Vodka bottles. I was getting alittle dizzy but I still could see Ann all over Ron. They were both drunk.

The van started moving. We were driving up the bulard and to get more Scotch and Vodka but we didn't have any money. While we were figuring out how to get the booze a van pulled up on the side of us. They asked if we wanted to go party with them. I wanted to go because we had no booze left. We got in with the other kids. They started passing around the booze.

The van started moving and that's all I could remember. When we woke up we were in a large field. I knew it was no where near we lived.

Ron, Ann, Sue, Alle, Pam, jimmy and I started to walk home. After a while we found an old abandoned car. We checked what was wrong then hot wired the car and left. Ron stopped the car because we were all getting sick. I clutched my stomach and everything came out. We started driving again and after a while of driving we saw a liquor store. We stopped then Paul went in when there were alot of people around. He went in and hid a couple of bottles in his coat and walked out.

I was the first to reach for the bottle. In no time we were drunk. The car started to swerve. I told Paul to stop but he said, "I can't stop the world from going around." The car went over the cliff a couple minutes later. Then the car flipped and everything went blank.

The next day the head line it said "Five teenagers die in a car explosion."

Linda Bolduc

At the beginning of the year nobody made an idea grow; all we did was write off the tops of our heads, and that was that. But now we all know that that's a no-no. We have to think before we write, and really that is the only way to write. Then the theme grows, all the ideas fall into place, in order.

I Wish I Were

I wish I were nobody except me because I like who I am. I like what I do. The life I choose. At times I went a real sister. Sure one of my friends is like a sister to me. She helps me like a sister, but she isn't always there. At times I'm not there for her either. We work on things togther. Even tho I can't have a real sister, this friend is better than no sister. So that is why I want to be me and noone else because I wouldn't trade my life for anyone eles.

Sharon Zinhart

Actually, the theme grows as we do. As Pam says, "In first grade we wrote about a tree, but now in eighth grade we write about the tree of life." Lara's explanation should expand what we mean for you.

HOW I GREW

As a writer I grew very quickly. Writing was always easy for me but keeping it up to my tough standards wasn't so easy. This is the beginning of my very first theme. Take into consideration the nervousness wnich I felt, as you read. The title of our first theme was "Pattern."

It was early spring, everyone was bustling about tending to their needs. I for one was in search of a home. Being a pregnant robin ready to bear her children, I was desperate for a nice comfortable tree limb to accomodate my babies and I. By this time I had saved up enough of my energy to begin the step by step procedure of building a home. Early every morning I flew out to scan the tree tops hoping to spot a safe place. On my third day out I entered the denser part of the woods. . . .

Writing that down just makes me laugh to think I wrote that not too long ago. To make the picture of my growth as a writer clearer to you, here is my very best theme. I wrote this in three parts which I found very difficult to keep together, but I did it.

Geoffrey

It was a crisp, late November morning: the frost covered the bottom edge of the glass window panes. Peering through the window, my warm breath fogged and melted the white frost. I watched the icy droplets roll down and git caught in the grooves of the wooden border. With a sigh I got up from my comfortable window seat and walked still half asleep across the cold, tile floor. Reaching the closet, I cautiously opened the big, oak door so as not to wake the children. I grabbed my plush robe off its hanger and lazily lumbered into it. Slipping my feet into a pair of worn scuffs, I made my way out into the dim, drafty hall . . .

I'm sure you can see the growth in such areas as detail, setting, style, form, tying together ideas, etc. My writing has grown drastically and mostly in this one year. I enjoy writing very much and plan to continue my skills for the rest of my life and with luck, I hope for my writing to keep growing, as I do.

(Lara's complete theme is included in Appendix B, pp. 159-166.)

4.

A window to our minds may show us many different signs and emotions.
We may look through our own special window and maybe see ...

a heart for love and affection
or an arrow to show us direction.
We may also see a broken heart along the way,
for times when we've been hurt and have nothing to say.
We could be in a special place
then see a star, moon, planet, and dream into space.
Sometimes we see pencil and paper when we want to write
or see an eye for a special window of sight.
Many times we could see all different shapes for our mixed emotions
or gears which make us think, which give us many notions.
The window may show us waves, and on each wave there is an idea to consider
or show a four leaf clover for good luck; bad luck it may get rid of.
We often see a question mark
because curiosity leaves us in the dark.
A flower can represent how we all have bloomed as writers through
  the years,
or we can all look through the window and gain many fears.
A smile that we see can make us burst out in laughter for no reason;
a cloud can come in any season.
My favorite sign is the rainbow because each color can represent
  anything we want it to;
then the sun can brighten our window for you -
a window to our minds.

— Nancy Harris

Sharing

Michelle, its your turn." I hear a voice say. I can feel eyes glaring at me. My body is starting to shake I am taking deep breaths for control. "Stop it relax." I say to myself. My body will not listen. I pick up my paper and start reading my theme to the class. Suddenly, it is so quiet. all I can hear is my voice reading. My leg is spastic. I panic. I dont know what to do. I on scared of being laughed at. I say to myself. "Please God dont let this happen to me. I keep on reading. All of a sudden Ive lost all control. My right leg is spastic. My right hand at the same time. I cant feel my face drawn to one side. I'm losing my voice. Suddenly I'm a mess, but I keep on reading. Then what I fear most, happen The embarasment of being laughed at. I feel left out, I keep on reading, and I think of a story I once wrote. "Its two embassing to talk about handicapped childen and its too complicated and sad. I wish I wasn't handicapped. I wish I didnt have my shoes built up I wish I'd use two hands. I wish my knee didnt bend back. I wish I could run with two feet. I wish I could do anything that I want I wish I could run and clap my hands at the same time. I wish the kids didnt make fun of me like-calling me mentally retarded, crippled hanticapped, deformed I wish I could speak the right words out. Maybe the grown ups would give me a chance to finish my story. Grown ups and children that are not handicapped are so lucky. I say to myself "I am so happy that you are not the way I am. My story is ended I am back in control. The tension is gone is class is together again, and I now belong feel like a new person. I feel the excitment while my story is being graded by my peers. Oh boy they graded me the highest mark, a 4!

God makes me an eighth grade student every Friday on Theme Day. I am so thankful.

Michelle Tveter

Being an eighth grade student on theme days means sharing. Michelle Tveter is probably our proudest student about that sharing, but the impact of opening oneself to a whole class through writing is felt in a spectrum of reactions, and many of those reactions have a direct impact on theme writing. Michelle's class, Room 3, discussed the relationship between sharing and writing. Part of their conversation follows:

Jody - Each theme is different in its own way. They're all individual, and they're all exciting. With the developing ideas...writing themes really taught us how to develop one idea. We learned how to take a whole bunch of ideas and develop them into something good. At first we didn't really know how to put them together; we didn't get into the writing like we do now.

Scott - Nobody really looked at the writing. It was something you had to do, an assignment. We didn't want to do it, but you also knew you had to.

Jody - It's not something that—I don't feel we have to any more. It's more like a thing that you like to do. Most people like to do their themes because they like to share all their ideas. It's bringing us all together, and we all understand each other through the themes.

Linda - You know what to expect from different people because they have a certain topic that they usually write on, but the stories are never the same; they use different characters.

Michael - They're deep and strong. Deep is like...when you go *into* a story; then you're talking deep. Strong is like emotional.

Jody - A deep theme...is an emotional theme, something that really happened that you're expressing your feelings out so that you can really see what's happening; you can almost feel what the other person is saying. A strong theme is organized in a good way.

Lisa - A deep theme is, ah...a lot of meaning is really put into it. If you really think about it, you realize that it really does mean something.

Stephen - It's not always emotional. A funny theme can be deep if you really get into it.

Michael - You don't always read it the way the punctuation is. You read it and put punctuation in when they read.

Mrs. M. - Do you mean punctuation or emphasis?

Maureen - A person can also write a really good theme, but when it comes to reading it, you can really mess it up.

Jody - By the way you read it. I think it's better if you read your own theme because you know what you wrote and you know how you want it said, and you know how the meaning is supposed to be.

Scott - People almost always do now. In the beginning of the year they switched.

Maureen - If it's an exciting one, some people can really make it happen by how they read.

Scott - At the beginning of the year nobody wanted to read their own themes because they didn't have enough faith in themselves. They thought they were going to mess up and everything. But then when they finally read their own theme and everybody started complimenting on themes, then everybody started reading their own themes. People started to enjoy their own themes; they started to get into their themes more. The best thing about theme day is reading your own theme and letting everybody know it's your theme and your writing.

Krissy - When you read your theme, you find all your mistakes. Then you know what you did wrong.

Maureen - Sometimes people don't like to read their own. If you hear someone else reading it, you can catch your mistakes more easily. When you're reading it, it's what you wrote, and that's what you want to say. It may not sound right, but it does sound right to you. If someone else reads it, then you can catch it.

Mary - Now we know what everybody likes, and we can pick ideas better.

Michael - It starts to get easy. We know how to do it.

Mary - It still isn't easy to write. It's easier, you know...you learn to see mistakes and everything, but no theme is really easy to write.

Mrs. M. - Maybe you're just more comfortable doing it?

The sharing does make theme days more comfortable. Students see classmates as helps, not hindrances, to writing. Dave Gosselin explains how his writing is improving as a result of sharing and includes a theme to show where he is now in that process of improving:

When I started writing themes, I couldn't even write a half decent one. Then every Friday we would read our themes out loud, and after we were done, the class would tell what was wrong with the theme. After about four weeks went by of having the class tell what's wrong with the themes, I got the hang of it and started concentrating on what the class members were telling me. Now my writings are getting better except I still need improving on putting ideas together. I think by the end of the year I should be able to write a good theme with the help of my class members.

I seem to be . . . . But Really . . . .

I seem to be in the year 1995 where there is no gas or electricity. The life style has changed. Everybody is wearing heavy fur clothing in the winter because the houses are not that warm and outside is very cold. The people are still living in houses made out wood. To heat the house and cook, the people would use woodstoves. For transportation the people ride bikes to their works, and also their work is done by man power. The people use candles for nighttime to light up the rooms. That's the life in 1995. But really I'm living in 1980. So I seem to be in the year 1995, but really 1980.

Joe Perrault shows that both good and bad themes can be shared with the class:

All week we get to do our themes, and then Thursday some of us

write the themes. We don't have a chance to read over the theme and correct all of our mistakes. And when we bring in our themes on Fridays, we don't have a good theme, and when we read our themes, we sometimes get degraded. And after it all happens, we write good themes. But when we write a theme like that, the whole class puts their two cents in and makes the theme better, so we can write a better theme than we had. So when you have a good theme, people tell you, and when you have a bad theme, people call it dumb and forget about it.

Nancy Harris explains that at times the class goes perhaps too far, sharing a joke that the one reading doesn't know about. But even that works out:

After I was through reading my last theme, everyone was silent because Rich told them not to laugh so I would be degraded. I said, "Oh my God," and buried my face in my hands. Then everyone laughed and said it was a real good funny theme. My class are real jokers! When they finally said it was good, it affected me so I continue to write well.

Scott Heath portrays the atmosphere the sharing circle sets:

the bright flurescent lights
hung from The boxy white ceiling
panels. They brightened up the pail
blue walls.

On one side of the room was
a window were the golden sunlight
shone in on the often messy teachers
desk. Directly across the room was
a large wooden door with a window.
It lead To the halls. Next to the door
was a chalkboard that had all the
social announcements from the extra
curricuLAukm events. handing on the
wall to the right was a big long
chalk board that was so often
covered the pointless grammer that

was usually the cause of dad test grades.

But on Friday this all stops. The deskes are arenged in an often worped circle. It would soon be acoupied by the Thumping hearts of the student. Hopeing hoping That There peers would like there theme the theme that they spent hours on Scraching on papers sharpening pencils and rewriting. Antisapating the moment that they have achieved the most rewarding grade of a four.

If not this week they will continue to try for that honor of the students and the Feeling of success

Chrissy Anderson talks about what most students deal with through the sharing process—feelings and reactions to feelings:

Theme days affect me in different ways. Sometimes when I write a theme about a personal experience and I think it is good, the other people think differently. If I think my theme is really bad, other people tell me what's good about it. It also makes me feel good to tell some of my experiences and have other people give reactions. I like theme writing; I can express my feelings and get them out of my system.

Joe Kovolyn agrees:

I think the process of theme reading is a good way to end a week. It helps to let off anger or makes you happy by having a good theme. I like to lay in bed and just think about the topic of that week, and by the next day I have a theme all picked out. It helps me to relax and show my feelings which are usually happy.

Whatever the ideas, however they are structured, the sharing causes students to strive toward their best, as these themes illustrate:

"Hang it up Candia, hang it up!" was the chant as the Windham Girls Basketball team piled off the bus and into Holden Brook School. There was a winning atmosphere. It was easy to see that our girls had more confidence and enthusiasm today than ever before. I had a gut feeling that this would be our day, I knew it, the team knew it.

The cheering continued in the locker room and during warm ups. Then it was time for the jump ball. I wiped my sweaty palms on my shorts and took my, my place around the circle. Shouts of "Duce" rang through out the gymnasium as Heather Ducette stepped into jump.

Candia brought the ball in for an easy two points right off the tap. I bit my lip. I thought we were in trouble, but we came back with two unanswered baskets.

At the end of the first quarter the score was tied. But our opposition did not tie us, nor did they take the lead again.

The game, by half time, had been played superbly. Everybody from Windham had gotten their share of points and/or rebounds and as a result Windham was leading 17-14.

We started the third quarter confident but not overly so. We felt positive that we would hold onto our lead but nobody knows better than Windham how fast a 3 point lead can be lost.

Each team was working extremely hard, but the Candia girls weren't working hard enough. And even though the calls were all going against us, which of course was to their advantage, they couldn't make good.

Windham hung on to their lead.

With less than a half minute left in the game Windham put up a shot which was rebounded by Candia.

We sped down court to assume our defensive positions so by the time Candia came down with the ball, Kristy and I were there to meet them. The bench started counting down the last ten seconds of the game.

Candia put up a "Hail Mary" which came crashing off the boards. The buzzer sounded. We had won! For the first time this season Windham had a taste of victory.

Tired and weary, sweat and tears running down my face, I was content to fall into the arms of my jubilant teammates.

- Amy LaBranche

Him

I see the rising sun,
Along the green grass of home
And I hear the silent wind,
Wander through the trees,
Then behind me I hear his cry.
I turn
He slips away,
Then whispers something,
I could not hear,
Beyond the blowing wind.
I walked toward him, he said
it again,
And I was sure.

Amy Baker

REMEMBERANCE

The dog ran down the road, the little boy giving chase.

"Charlie, please come back," The boy called to the dog again and again.

The little boy had tears in his eyes. His father had told him what could happen when Charlie ran away. He could get hit by a car, stolen or he could get lost.

The little boy was now getting frustrated. He began to scream and cry in his frustration. The dog ran just far enough ahead of the boy so as he could not be caught. The boy realized that his pet was getting closer to the highway. He screamed as hard as he could to try and get Charlie to stop.

Charlie looked back over his shoulder at the little boy and kept running.

The little boy cried out as Charlie ran onto the highway. He heard a screech of brakes, a short skid, and a loud thump. His eyes opened wide in terror as he looked down at Charlie, who lay in the road, not far from the car that had hit him. There was a tall man leaning next to the dog. The little boy ran over to his dog and knelt beside him. He was crying very hard now, and he was trembling.

"Charlie?" The boy waited for his pet to move, but nothing. He did not realize the dog was dead and fell down on top of it, crying. He grabbed the dog around the neck and buried his face in the soft fur.

"Charlie, please do something; don't be dead." The boy was almost hysterical now. He squeezed the dog's neck and cried harder.

The man standing next to the dog and boy buried his face in his hands.

"I'm sorry; I never saw him, I never even saw him."

The boy did not hear him. His mind was at the point of exploding, as was his heart. He loosened his arms from around the dog's neck and reached up to Charlie's face. He brushed the fur back from his eyes, and patted his muzzle.

"Charlie? Please Charlie!"

The boy got up slowly, still holding the dog around the neck. He tried to pick it up but failed. The tall man reached down and picked up the dog.

"Please mister, maybe mommy can do something," the boy pleaded. He grabbed the man's pantleg and pulled, leading him up the road.

They approached the house, and the little boy's mother came running out.

"Mommy, please help Charlie."

The tall man could not speak. He gently placed Charlie on the thick grass. The boy's mother walked over to the dog, kneeled down, and petted the long, soft fur on the dog's back.

"Honey, I think Charlie is dead."

"But mommy I love Charlie; he can't be dead." The boy again kneeled down by the dog. He pulled the fur back from the dog's eyes, and petted him. Tears trickled down his cheeks as he bent down and kissed the dog on the nose. He was thinking about Charlie now, about the fun they had had, and how nice having a friend like Charlie was. He buried his face in the dog's neck again and hugged him.

"Charlie, I love you very much, good bye. I'm going to miss you."

The End.

—Keith Dunkley

5.

As I look into the mirror, I see the image of me,
or are my insides different from the portrait that I see?
Am I really like this, or is there something trying to hide?
Is there something missing, something beyond outside?
I wish I had a window so that I could really see
who is inside there and who is really me.
Sometimes when I am writing themes a lot of things I find.
I can almost see me inside like a window to my mind.

— Jodi Desharnais

Expressing Feelings

Students feel that an important part of writing is the way they express feelings through words. At first their approach was fairly superficial, for their preliminary need was to become comfortable writing about feelings. Kim Ryan and Debbie Dugan explain:

> **The time would come when we'd have to read our theme out loud. Our hands would gather up sweat as they shook from nervousness. As we each read our theme, the words blurted out from beginning to end. When each of us finished, a sigh of relief was expressed. When everyone was done reading, we realized that they showed respect for what we wrote. While moving to the next class, the tension, which had left the class quiet, was back to normal.**
>
> **After reading our theme that week a system of commenting on themes was started. This system wasn't to put down people's writing but to improve it. One thing found wrong with our themes was that time and effort were not put into them to make them understandable and reasonable.**
>
> **As time went on, the sharing of themes improved our writing drastically. It gave us an understanding of how people thought, whether funny, emotional, etc. We began feeling comfortable around the class, like a family. The nervousness and tension seemed to have disappeared. We then had trust in the class as a whole.**
>
> **A newer type of writing developed from this change. Our writing became better, and our friendship became stronger. Sharing can be rewarding in many ways.**

Hurt inside me was building up when my boyfriend broke up with me. We had been seeing each other for two years, but the time came when he had to go into the army. He didn't want to hurt me, but this is what he thought he had to say.

Dear Sweet Lilac,

The time has come where we have to depart. I thought this over carefully and came out with one solution. I want you to see other men. That means the ties between us have to loosen. I know this hurts me as well as you, but I don't want you to suffer when there're all those men that can enjoy your company as well as I do. I hope you'll forgive me for telling you this way.

Love
Always
Jim

P.S.

Let's keep in touch
and stay friends forever

I saw him off but the hurt has led me, at the side of this cliff. Below me is a river that flows undesturbed. While my life points to nothing without Jim.

Staring down at the water, I see Jim's pale face full of pain. I felt like jumping in after him and begging him not to leave.

Then my foot slipped off the rocks. All of a sudden before I fell, someone grabbed me. I turned around and hugged him gratefully, while tears dripped my face.

He handed me a hankerchief. I blew my nose, and we spent the rest of the day talking.

My life is now spent in his presents because we are man and wife. Jim is still in my life but only as a friend. Jim and I will never have the love between us as we did a few years ago. We live knowing what could have been, but my husband is the man my love is with. It may change in time, but I ~~plan~~ learned to let things take their course.

Kim Ryan

Hidden in the shadow of an Alley. Just a dim light from A candle that was Burning in the window above. Slowly I slipped my hand into my Spotless white Gloves. I reached into my Black Bag, and felt around for my surgical Knife. I grasp it tightly and pulled it out

At that moment a lady of the evening was rounding the Corner. She wore a pale green dress with a white shawl drape over her shoulders. Her Black hair was pinned up in Back with flower

The knife witch held the knife Quivered as she walked By the alley way. I waited until she past and well up the street. I krept up the street And silently followed her up the street.

It was awhile Before I could catch up with her. It was then she realized I was behind her. She made an attempt two run. I grabbed at her only grabbing her shawl. I chased her down a Blacken alley ~~[illegible]~~ way.

I cornered the desperate girl like a Hawk ready to strike. She screamed I quickly clamped my hand over her mouth. Without a moment hesitation I jabbed my surgetic knife in her Chest ripping off the top half of her dress with my other hand I jabbed over and over again her Body fell lifelessly to the ground I ripe out her heart holding it in my left hand taking a note out of my pocket with on the envolope It had Jack the Ripper.

Sean [illegible]

DECISION

Deciding what to do for your theme can be verry aggravating, but I have decided to write my theme about eagles because the Bald Eagle is my favorite animal. I would like to be an eagle so that I could soar through the sky and and everyone else would respect me. I think it would be fun to be an eagle for a week or so. I could get away from all the aggravation and pollution of the cities and large towns. It would be nice to be free, to be able to go anywhere I'd want, and to fly through the air without a trouble in the world. I'm glad I decided to do my theme on eagles

By Jody Crawford

At this point themes about feeling were fictional or imaginative; real feelings were not yet uncovered. Mimi Salzman and Margaret Parks show the next step, seeing more angles, more viewpoints about feelings:

We wish to display for you our thoughts about expressing our feelings and personal thoughts through writing, how to bring out ideas,

look at them from all angles, then put them down on paper using meaningful and carefully chosen words.

The method we often use is we begin with sorting out the different ideas and choose the one we find most interesting. Then we brainstorm thoughts about our topic. We decide which form we wish to use such as story, poem, or essay.

Mimi is a very good writer. She follows through with one idea. One of her best themes is "The Caterpillar."

The Caterpillar

I see you crawling, inching amoung
the rocks.
Seeking for a cozy home within
the green hemlock.

Upon a large green leaf, your home
will soon take form
A family you will bear and to-
gether you'll stay warm

Growing old in unison just you and
your wife
Knowing that you've fulfilled a
good and hearty life.

Your children have grown up and
left your little leaf
starting a life of their own they'll
live with trust and belief

Perhaps traveling far and
maybe searching right close by,
They will have a family to
live together and to die

The chain will then keep growing
as the family does enlarge.
Learning, living and loving but
never to discharge.

For you alone had started it this
family I know see.
A tiny little catarpillar began
a growing family tree.

Mimi Salzman

Margaret's poem "The Mime" describes a very normal, everyday thing with depth and emotion:

The Mime

Silent, with jerkey toy-like
movements, he communicates
with the children.

Dressed in black, with a ghost-
like face.
Showing no expression except
that which is painted on.

Giving love and happiness to
the children around....
Only the thoughts which are
pictured in a childs mind
appear.

Not a word spoken, to create
a spell,
The children watch transfixed
Until he fades away.

Margaret Parks

Maria Diem expresses her view about handling feelings about real life experiences:

Your writing can become better if you express your real feelings in it. For instance, mine did. I find it easier than making up characters' feelings; I make the characters do what I would do in real life. I sometimes use things that really happened in my life; that way my writing will be in better order and in great detail. Plus it helps me get a topic, say like for a theme, faster. It's also better if you write a very complex, deep theme; it would help the reader to understand and interpret it better if it involved something that happens in real life. Real

life happenings can help you get a good subject and you can write more, but remember, not everything is true for everybody; some people write differently.

Eventually real life becomes an integral part of theme days. Students respond to and build upon each other's ideas. The results affect feelings further, as Joanne Groetzinger reveals:

When we write a theme, we put forth a lot of feeling and emotions. We feel for each other; we feel for ourselves. Kris wrote about her parents divorcing and how she felt. She got upset, and tears started to fall. I felt terrible because of her parents and to see the pain in her and what she's going through. I started to think about myself. Like Kris, people get emotional reading their themes because they write out something painful that's happened or is happening to them and can't say it because it's hard to say and hurts, but they can write it. Watching a person express themselves while reading themes, when the theme is funny, the person is laughing and having a good time reading the theme; when a person is serious, we know the theme she or he wrote is serious. Richard wrote about out-of-space characters and was serious about his theme. The following week Pete and Brian wrote about Kulubian warships which was also out-of-space characters and was funny and had a wild, unreal imagination. When we hear someone else's theme, some remind us of ourselves and our problems. We find it easier to write about our problems, then read it to someone else. They put forth their opinions, and then we feel better because we're looking at the problem and seeing what we're really feeling and what's on our minds the most.

Sometimes a whole class gets involved together through feelings. In this eighth grade Room 1 became known as the "emotional" room. Mark Delaney values that label:

Room 1 has a definite way of expressing emotions and feelings. Ours is unique and can only really fit in if read to the other students of Room 1. We make the emotion we are writing about fill Room 1; its depth and secrecy touch each student and pull them into its own world.

We write about imagination and reality, but most of all love. This love is present as each student reads his/her theme. We feel this is what gives Room 1 its unique way of writing. Both Mark and Scott Rogers wrote themes about their brothers; they share these as examples of Room 1's emotions:

A Decision for Jealousy

Everything I do is wrong! My parents favor my little brother, and his hamsters get more than I do. I have to come home right after school to work while my brother goes over my Grandparent's house to eat or watch television. I think I will get rid of all my jealousy by running away. Down South maybe, with my older brother, at least he'll appreciate me. I will plan it for Tuesday.

Tuesday has finally come. After school I will start my long journey. I had just packed my suitcase and started out the door, when I saw a baseball bat, mine, a glove, mine, and a ball, mine also. I lay down my suitcase and walked around the hse looking at all of my possesions, that my parents bought me. I found that I had my share of being a spoiled little brat also, and now it was his time. Then I thought of how my older brother must of thought about me. I brought my suitcase to my bedroom, and unpacked.

Mark Delaney

MY SPECIAL BROTHER

He would have been but seventeen if he hadn't been taken by the mighty god. I sometimes say to my self why to such a nice and caring brother. I sometimes wonder why did it happen to such a nice kid. He lost to a very powerful disease called leukemia, eventhough he were a very good fighter and winner over diseases in a long run he was the loser. I wonder why sometimes it happened to such a nice and brave boy. He cared more about other young people with the desease than himself, they were so very young and they didn't ever have a chance to tackle the world. He did some good things life for other people and himself. His biggest wonder was when he built his dunebuggy, that was *his pride. Whenever I look at the dunebuggy, a window is picture in my mine, it's a shadow of him sitting in the car. And he calls me over to tell me to keep him, because he loves me. I hope the special love will last between us for ever.*

— Scott Rogers

Jen Anthony, Lana Clivio, and Chris Field try to define the process by which emotional themes developed in Room 1:

We as a whole are trying to get the surface stuff away and really find ourselves. We write our themes, then read them to each other. As we read the theme, the words just flow out of our mouths, and as we read, the emotions start to show. The emotions of each brings us together. We don't just have a bond; we have an emotional bond. Sometimes it hurts, but we don't close up. We show our emotions by laughing, crying, etc. We also make good judgments on each other's themes. We write best in expressing our feelings.

The following themes illustrate how the emotional bond helps students deal with aspects of reality that they are being forced to face.

Decision

In every day life people of all around have to make decisions. One of my biggest and hardest decisions was when my grandfather died in August 1980. He meant a great deal to me and my family. He had white hair and green eyes; he was also a very handsome man. He was 69 when he died. I had as one person to make a decision which may sound mean, but I had to make a decision to either block him out of my mind forever, or to think about him in the special ways such as the good times we spent together and the way we did those special times.

It took me a while of real hard thinking. Because I loved him so much, I didn't want to block him out of my mind, but I didn't wan't to cry every time someone mentioned his name.

I made the decision to keep thinking about him, even though it hurts sometimes. I think this was a good decision because, all I have to do is think about the good times we spent together.

The way he died was another persons decision this one was god's. I think god made a good decision because my Pepére died traveling, and that was something my Memére and Pepére loved to do.

The love will always stay in my thoughts, heart, and mind. I ~~lo~~ loved him dear and hope to see him in heaven.

A decision is a hard thing to do sometimes, but alot of people have to make them every day.

By Chris Field

My mind was filled with all kinds of thoughts as I walked up to the casket to see him lying there. He had a blank expression on his face after fifteen great years of living.

As I walked back to sit down, I thought of all the mouners that shuffled up to get a last look of the painted-like face, knowing they knew as well as I did, the reason for his death.

He said he was going to a party at Mike's, a friend of his. Mike said Scott had arrived with a Puetro Rican kid, only known as Johnny. According to Mike, Johnny had put something in Scott's drink. As he passed out, they threw cold water on him, hoping he would come out of it. But what they didn't know was that he would never come out of it.

Mike got a few people together and threw him on the bed and said, "maybe he'll sleep it off."

When a couple of hours went by and they couldn't wake him up, they knew he didn't have a chance. Mike dragged Scott out of the house and into a van. He drove him to his house and put him in the back of Scott's mothers car, then put a blanket that only covered half of him.

The next day his mom was getting in the car and spotted him. She pulled the blanket off and was shocked. Quickly she drove him to the hospital. There, they did an autopsy that proved heroin in the blood. He's gone. But he'll always have a special place in my heart. Reality can be an impossible burden.

— Debbie
Dugan

When?

Sometimes people wonder
Where it all ends,
Who is their enemy,
-And who is their friend?

If life is a vapor
That blows fast away,
Or if life is forever
In a good or bad way.

If problems in life
Are sent to discourage
Or what could it be?...
They are sent to bring courage?

Sometimes people wonder
And look for the day
That all of their problems
Will go away.

When is the time?
What is the day?
That a discouraging life
-Will finally pass away

Look in a mirror
What do you see...
Is it the life,
You wish it to be??

Patty Lagasse

To summarize the way expressing emotions affects the process of growing together as writers, Room 1 includes the following conversation as it was transcribed from an emotional discussion:

In this section Room 1 goes through the window to our minds. We open up to everyone about our deep, inner feelings and emotions about how we grow together as writers.

Carol - Writing brought most of us together. It brought the feelings out in everyone. It truly did.

Chris - I used to be loud, and I still am, but now I can share my themes without anybody laughing at them.

Jen - We felt that emotions...now that we can share our emotions, we've given up bad times. We all stick together as a class.

Chris - Jen, that's good.

Scott - When we started writing, we weren't together. We weren't close. When we read our first themes, we were far apart, but now we started to grow close together. Themes have tied together; they've started to vary. When that happens, you start writing varied; you start following what you mean better.

Sean - Another thing that helped me grow as a writer was starting to trust people in the class. When I read my first theme, I couldn't...I wrote crappy and my theme came out crappy. But as I started to trust, I knew I could do what I want when I start writing my stuff, so I wrote pretty good.

Mrs. M - Is the main point here that people are not afraid to show parts of themselves that they used to hide?

Ken - Before, at the beginning, I used to be afraid. I'd come up with a pretty good idea, but then I was afraid that the class might put it down and everything. Now I'm not afraid to just put down what I'm thinking about.

Sean - You wrote a wicked good theme last week.

Mrs. M. - How, for example, did you get into the sharing you're doing now that no other class is doing? Explain that on tape. When I came back after planning period, you were all sitting on the floor in the center of the circle...

Carol - We can share our feelings with everyone without people laughing.

Mrs. M. - What are you *doing* in that circle? You've never told me what you're doing.

Sean - We're trusting people. We can actually say to a person anything we want. Like Mark used to say *woun't* and *din't*. We told him so he can straighten out and not start with any big battle. And I can take, "Sean, you're a moron," I can take that when I'm sitting there in the circle, and everybody's doing it together. (To tape recorder) And I want to be a star, someday.

Jen - Some people are afraid to say something; some people have been put down before. What we're trying to do is be their friends, tell them that we really like them.

Jon - Some people are afraid to express their true emotions. When they're mad at somebody, they don't just go out and say, "Hey, I'm mad at you." They'll write it. (Chorus of yeah's) I won't mention any names, but they'll write a theme, and then everybody hears it, and eventually the person it's directed at will hear it.

Mimi - I think that what separates us from other classes is in the other classes everyone's an individual, but they're all the same. There's no groupness. They don't care about each other.

Scott - That's why if we ever lost people in the class, the class could just fall apart.

Sean - It would crush our moral spirit.

Jen - We're trying to fight to stay together.

Scott - Like Jennifer, she's a leader for the girls.

Mrs. M. - That's what made the class come together?

Scott - Yeah.

Mrs. M. - We *were* really negative for a while.

Scott - That's what we needed in the eighth grade to smarten this eighth grade up.

Sean - We were terrible scared. We were scared that you'd break us up, and we didn't want that, so we all straightened out.

Jen - The other classes, when we were down, they thought we were stupid. When someone makes fun of one person, we all stick together. It's like a real family 'cause when somebody picks on one...

Sean - We learned how to trust each other, to write what we feel.

Chris - At the beginning of the year we were afraid to read our themes, but now we grow together as a family, so now it's better. Our writing is better than before.

Scott - I think we grew 'cause of content. When we wrote, we just wrote whatever came to our mind. We didn't think of the idea more in depth. We just took the words and just threw 'em down. We didn't take it apart and build it more from there. It was really screwy. But now Mrs. M. has taught us to do different things. That's helped us a lot.

Jen - Yeah, when we used to write, we used to screw up and everything. When we read each other our themes, everyone would make a comment and everything, and that really helped because then we each learned something from each other. Everyone told everyone else what we needed in the theme to make it better.

Chris - Yeah, the comments helped. When you do that thing, the 1 and 7 chart,* it helps tell us what we're doing wrong.

Sean - Comments didn't help me grow. I always felt people were out to get me. I just let it bounce off. Comments didn't help me.

Scott - I think why that happened is when you attacked people before you read your theme, and then they...

Chris - And then they attacked you.

Scott - Then they got...

Sean - See, people are out there to get me.

Scott - Sean, shh—listen—there's an influence. Whenever you influence somebody else's theme, they'd...it happened to me too, Sean. Me and you both got on somebody, and then I wouldn't want to read mine because I knew everybody'd yell at me. You gotta learn not to do that 'cause that's when you fall apart as writers.

Lana - You know what? It's like a the beginning of the year we were like a giant jigsaw puzzle. None of us really went together.

Scott - We didn't fit together. Our content, our ideas, weren't tied together.

Lana - We had all our ideas down on paper and everything. We didn't want to read them because we felt, like this was in the wrong place, and we didn't know where we were going. As the year went on, we bettered in our writing. A bond

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A checklist, modified from an NCTE model to monitor during third quarter how well students are actually applying the skills they are trying to learn (see Appendix C).

grew between us that we knew what to expect from this one in writing. We got used to the fact that this one's gonna write emotional, and this one's gonna write whatever they're gonna write.

Lana - And we accepted it, and when somebody jumped on somebody, everybody else said, "Well look, there's good points in this and bad points, but don't jump down their throats; just explain it." We kinda grew that way.

Sean - I like putting down themes.

Scott - I agree with Lana because when she writes a theme, it's either about one person or about her other friends. She always cares about people; she's got feelings about other people.

Chris - Now that we know each other's feelings, we can say things without getting embarrassed.

Lana - We can relate to what they're trying to say.

Chris - Before nobody would say...if someone wrote a theme about somebody, they wouldn't say their name, but now they do because everybody knows what's going on.

Scott - Everybody was afraid to read because they thought that it'd get out to the other classes.

Sean - Some people still hide their themes and not put names in.

Jen - Maybe the reason why...when we write emotional themes, it's not that we're thinking of sad things when we wrote it, well in a way say, but it's that we wrote it so good; we put all our efforts and our feelings in it, and so it made it real, not sad. It's not just the time or what happened; it's how we wrote it with real-life things in it.

Scott - It's like when I've written themes about my brother, I wrote 'em with no problem at home. I had the earphones on, and I had no problem. I was writing it, and I didn't start crying, and then I kept reading it, and I had no problem. I says, "Oh, I'm gonna go into class and read it." When I get into class, I feel...I shake.

Chris - I know. That's what I did about my grandfather. I kept reading it over, and I wrote it, and I go, "Ah, this is good."

Scott - But you know this class will be behind you, but you still, you're shaky.

Lana - That's the reason you get so upset, because you put so much trust in the rest of the class that you know they'll understand what you're writing and how personal it is to you. And they can relate to you and how you feel so they feel the same way, and you got a shoulder to cry on now, whereas before you might not of.

Jen - It's like a promise, like everyone saying, "Don't worry; we promise we're behind you all the way." When somebody's young, older people say, "Oh, we'll never die," and they'll say, "We really love you." Then all of a sudden they die, and they break their promise. They don't mean to. When you're reading, you're afraid that the class is going to break their promise of dying in a way. They're not going to be behind you any more.

Scott - Like I said to Jennifer before she read her theme, I said to her if she needs any help when she's reading it, I'll come over. That's the way you gotta be. You gotta help each other. We're learning. We're in that stage. We're only teenagers, not adults like Mrs. M. We don't handle things as mature as adults. And that's why things don't work out for us as easy. We have problems. You gotta know the feeling.

Chris - You know when Jen used to write about John's death and everything. Well nobody really knew him, but now that she wrote about him everybody seems like they know him now. When Scott wrote about his, we all...

Sean - You all started crying which is wrong.

Several - No, it isn't!

Scott - Sean, if you...listen. You don't knock things like that. It's not funny, Sean. It haunts you. It haunts you, Sean.

Sean - That made me sick the other day, everybody running out of the room crying.

Scott - That shows that they have feelings for other people. They're not selfish.

Lana - Sean, it shows that we care for each other.

Scott - Sean, if someone says like your brother died today, and then you wrote about it and someone started crying...it would make you feel better. They'd try to help you.

Sean - It's wrong.

Jen - It's because we'd feel sorry for *you.*

Scott - They'd feel just as bad as you would.

Chris - Why don't we have a right to cry? Tell me that.

Melissa - Sean, are you afraid of crying?

Sean - I'm not afraid of crying!

Melissa - Then why won't you let us?

Jen - That's nobody's business but Sean's.

Lana - That isn't the right question to ask.

Sean - Okay, every time somebody writes anything, I'm walking out of the room crying. I'm gonna cry during Science and Social Studies. I'm gonna cry in every other class. Every time they mention some poor black slave, I'm gettin' up and cryin' and walkin' out of the class.

(Laughter)

Lana - Sean, if one of my brothers died, wouldn't you want to try to console me in a way?

Sean - I wouldn't cry for you.

Lana - Yeah, but wouldn't you want to try to console me in a way? That's just another way of us trying to console. What are we supposed to do, go over to you and say, "Give me a great big hug"? That's gonna look real cute. So instead, we feel bad in a way.

Sean - You don't have to cry.

Lana - All right, but we do.

Sean - Jody got shot. I don't see all you girls crying.

Lana - Because we knew he was gonna be all right.

Sean - My pal.

Jen - We didn't see you cry either.

Sean - All right.

Jen - Don't get on our backs about it.

Lana - You know what's weird about this class? It's that even if someone would say, "The guys are bein' emotional; they're queer," in this class everybody's arm in arm. It's like we're all sisters and brothers. We really care. It's really weird to have a guy sit up and say, "It's gonna be okay."

Sean - Everybody's too close.

Lana - We gotta be close, Sean.

Scott - I agree with Lana 'cause in eighth grade...

Sean - Everybody's going somewhere different after eighth grade. You shouldn't be that close.

Scott - Listen, Sean. It's just like Lana said. In eighth grade you think kids are gonna be big kings and stuff, and they're gonna be smokin' and that's all they're gonna talk about—drugs, sex, and rock ' roll.

(Laughter)

Scott - We care for each other.

Sean - It's not gonna work.

Chris - It's workin' now.

Scott - Sean, it's gonna work.

Sean - It won't. You'll go to Salem, and he'll go to Trinity, and I'll go to Pinkerton.

Lana - We know how to write now. We can write to each other.

Scott - It'll work. The closer you get, the stronger your relationship's gonna be when you get older.

Lana - If a relationship's strong now, we'll stay together.

Scott - I'm waitin'. Graduation that kid's gonna be cryin'. I know it.

Sean - I'll bet ten dollars on it, now.

Scott - Everybody cries.

Jen - We do, growing up. Now when people read our writing, they'd say, "Oh my God, this kid, she's only in eighth grade or he's only in eighth grade. Boy, he's really mature for his age; you can tell by his writing." My mom says that she can tell by any of our writings. Our writings are different from us, but we have grown because our writing has ...

Mrs. M. - How is your writing different from you?

Jen - Well, sometimes, the meaning is way different from what I act. It's a little mature.

Lana - What happens in our writing is that you say: all right, this is where I want to show them what I feel, so you let yourself loose a little bit; you say, all right I'll put whatever I think and feel down on paper; then I'll sort it all out and put it together and make it form. That's like sayin' we're gonna cut everything; we're gonna sit down and concentrate, and we let ourselves be ourselves, and then that's how it comes out on paper. If we let ourselves be ourselves, then we're a lot more mature than sometimes we are.

Lana - In this class, we're so close nobody's gonna say, "I'm gonna look like a fool" because you won't look like a fool in this class.

Melissa - We trust each other.

Lana - Our class fits so tight together that nothing can pull this class apart. There is nothing that can pull this class apart.

Sean - Calvin has an interesting point. Lana said nothing can pull this class apart. Calvin says a 44 magnum could, which is right.

Lana - If everybody in this class died, we'd still be together.

Sean - No, we wouldn't.

Scott - Sean, you're a hero in this class, Sean.

6.

Every day each writer searches to find
The writing ability in the back of their minds,
For what makes each writer good or bad
Is the past experience in writing they've had.
They search to find the way they learned
To write the themes with grades they've earned.
Be it emotional, fact or just plain chance
This talent they wish to find and enhance,
For writing helps to express inner thought;
Without their writing what else have they got?
So what they search for and eventually find
Is a fascinating window—Writing: A Window To Our Mind.

— Lana Clivio

Changing

Since they began with a taping about their first sharing of themes, the Accelerated class decided to end with another taping, this one about how they feel about theme days now and what has changed for them.

Bobby - **Now we know more what a theme is and writing, it's no more...it's not as much of a chore except sometimes when you don't have enough time. If you write a good theme, if you have a good idea, it's sort of fun to write.**

Mrs. M. - **Who else? Let's go around. Amy?**

Amy - **Writing is coming a lot easier. I appreciate my work and everyone else's more now than I did then.**

Mrs. M. - **Why?**

Amy - **(hesitant) Because for the most part it's a lot better. Seems like a lot more time goes into the themes now than it did then.**

Mrs. M. - **And what comes out that's better?**

Amy - **Just the whole theme, the way it's put together, beginnings and endings and details...**

Voices - **Boring. C'mon Amy!**

Mrs. M. - **When you listen to themes, why do you like them better? That's what you need to tell us.**

Amy - **It's more interesting. Everyone's writing better, so it's more interesting!**

Mrs. M. - **All right. Karen?**

Karen - **It's coming easier. I appreciate it more.**

Mrs. M. - **Even though you're doing harder stuff? You particularly are setting higher goals for yourself. Is that it? All right, Dan?**

Dan - **I think I know what I appreciate more because I recognize the false and the good things more than I used to because I wasn't as experienced.**

Janet - **I like to take one basic problem now and put it into a story**

that will be interesting and will show a believable way to solve the problem.

Pam W. - I guess we learned how to tie things together and catch the reader's attention and keep it.

Mrs. M. - Pam, think. You write a lot about things that mean much to you. Are you just writing to catch the reader's attention?

Pam W. - I write about mostly things that happen to everybody, and I write about those in a way that's easier to relate to.

Scott J. - Yeah, she seems to always write about love.

Ken - Love, love.

Jay - Love poems.

Mrs. M. - But the real things that are hitting people here are issues like love, drugs, war...

Jay - Love drugs.

Pam W. - Sex, drugs, rock 'n roll!

Mrs. M. - Yeah, you still want us to title a chapter that, but you don't want to write it—"Sex, Drugs, Rock 'N Roll"!!

Patty - I'm beginning to enjoy it a little more since I know what I'm doing.

Mrs. M. - Would there have been an easier way to put you through that so you'd know from the beginning what you're doing?

Patty - I don't know.

Linda - I feel more comfortable now that I know what to do with the stories and stuff, how to be specific and stuff.

Jana - I'm not as nervous as I used to be in the beginning. Now I feel *almost* comfortable reading my themes. Sometimes I still worry.

Pam B. - At the beginning of the year I used to hate Fridays, but now I look forward to hearing everyone's writing. And I'm more confident myself about how my theme's gonna come out and how my grade will be.

Cheryl - I know what I'm doing now. Writing isn't a task like it was in the beginning when I felt like I had to write. Now it comes easier to me. I enjoy hearing themes because everybody's improved and it brings us closer to everybody.

Chris - Easier for me because now I can express my thoughts and describe with details, so it's more what's really happening and feelings that I had felt.

Megan - I'm not as nervous to read my themes now. I know they're better; I still don't think they're good, but I know they're better. My friends always say they're good.

Keith - I feel more experienced as a writer. I like my writing more than I did.

Mrs. M. - What's changed?

Keith - The way I write it. I used to list things a lot. But now I have more detail fit together.

Tony - I feel more confident. Themes have become a big part of my week and everything, so I gained experience in writing a lot of themes. It gave me a chance to express myself.

Scott J. - I seem to like writing more than I did. I seem to come by ideas easier because I'm hearing everybody else, and they're good. I seem to have grown in my writing because I keep seeing how everybody else has grown. It sorta helps me.

Mrs. M. - How did you get over the block you had in the beginning? You didn't think you had much to say.

Scott J. - I don't know. I just figured that the only way I was gonna be good was to do good myself, and I had to pull it and do it myself. Now I'm spending a lot of time on my themes. I still do it on Thursday night, but I'm spending a lot of time on Thursday night. Compared to using an hour worth of my time working on a theme, now it's a lot more, three or four hours.

Mrs. M. - And the difference is you? *Your* voice is there now, isn't it?

Scott J. - Yeah, I feel a lot better writing.

Joe - I still don't like writing themes. It's kind of a break on Friday because you can just sit back and listen to someone else.

Mrs. M. - So you like to listen but not write?

Joe - That's right.

Mrs. M. - Are you better at writing even though you don't like it?

Joe - Yeah.

Ken - I feel the same way. I hate reading my themes; I hope it will stop at the person before me. I don't mind writing, but...

Craig - I consider writing a greater challenge. In the beginning of the year I really couldn't write a theme, but now I can. I let people's topics also inspire me to write about the same things that they're writing about.

Scott M. - I think I've become better in writing by writing. I'm not as nervous to read as I used to be.

Jay - I don't mind writing themes any more. I guess they're getting a little bit better. I like listening to people's themes 'cause the night before you almost know what they're going to write about. A lot of people stay on their same topics, like Pam and her love poems and dead people...

Craig - And Lara and her soap opera.

Scott J. - And Blink and his Kalubians.

Joe - And Keith and his dog.

Pam W. - (to Jay) And you and your hollow grass.

Jay - I don't mind writing any more because of that.

David - I feel the same way. I think I've grown quite a bit in writing this year. I seem to be able to talk and think better in front of the class. I think I write better when I write about things I don't know. (Laughter) My style has changed, I write about different topics, I write different.

Mrs. M. - If you write like you're talking right now, you're in trouble.

Patrick - I don't really like reading my themes out loud. It comes easier to write them though.

(Dissolves into everyone saying at once that hearing is what they all like but agreeing that writing is the center of why they like to hear.)

Through writing, eighth graders have changed. Evaluating that change in their final writing assignment "Portrait of Myself As A Writer,"* students focused on the changes not in their writing but in themselves. With varying degrees, confidence and a sense of accomplishment unfold in every paper. Hear what these students, as examples, have to say about themselves.

> *I think writing is one of the keys to a person's personality. It reveals her/his thoughts, ideas, and emotions. That shows what the person is like deep down inside.*
>
> *When I look back at the themes I have written, I think of myself and why I chose the topics that I did. A person can learn a lot about the self by doing that writing. Writing also has changed the way I think*

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* I borrowed this assignment from another Exeter Writing Project Fellow, Ted Boulogiane.

about things. When I daydream, I find myself putting my ideas together in the form of a theme or when I have a problem I can't solve, I write a theme about it, reread it over and over again, and it helps me understand a lot of things more clearly.

But mostly writing has taught me about me myself and me the writer.

— Maureen Moynihan

I think of myself as a fairly good writer. I search for ideas and find them. When I write themes or just stories, I sometimes have difficulties, but in the end I'll somehow come through.

— Kerry Culleton

When I first wrote a theme, I wasn't sure of myself. As I started writing more, thoughts came through clearer and ideas came frequently. I could imagine myself being in the spot of the character, knowing its feelings and thoughts. Sometimes I use the character to get my feelings out. I think I am a better writer in telling details and events. Knowing myself and the character and placing them together I can write a good theme. Now I am no longer unsure of myself.

— Linda Bolduc

When I look at myself as a writer, I see a person who has accomplished something he could never do well before. I'm not saying that I am the best, but I write better now that I did before. I've learned how to go deep which in my own feelings means more than tying things together and so on.

— Ken Champagne

Writing is a tool I use to express my inner feelings. When I am afraid of misjudgements and misunderstandings, I write for clarification and corrections. When I first began writing, I was so scared of being put down or cast out. My writing was confused and unconnected. I couldn't develop my ideas into a strong theme. I didn't know how. As I practiced, I progressed into a better way of expressing ideas. I cared so much about the way people would feel about my writing. As I grew, I learned that I write what I want and I don't have anyone to please but me. I am no longer afraid.

— Margaret Parks

I think of myself as a writer, a writer who is proud of her work. I have grown a lot as a writer, and I feel that writing has become an *important part of my life. I've learned to let my imagination and emotions wander to form something that makes sense. I like writing now. I write for pleasure and enjoyment, not just because it's due for school. I love to write and will keep on writing until I'm old.*

— Pam Wojas

Writing is no longer something I do to please my teachers. It has become a medium through which I am able to express myself and my opinions. More than just a pleasure, writing is important now; the need to better myself continues to grow. I sometimes find myself writing when I don't have anything to do, and my environment imposes many ideas which I can write about.

Theme after theme, week after week, I strive to achieve my ever-growing goal, to write better. I set standards for myself that are sometimes hard to meet, and once in a while I will have a theme that is not on par with my others, but it happens. I spend a lot of time thinking of topics, but the writing is the hardest part. I read quite a bit to get ideas on what to write, but mainly to investigate the styles of other authors. These different styles help me to define mine, for I make a mix that allows me to change from one style to another, each being similar.

There are very few restrictions on the themes we write, except that until you have mastered sentences, fragments are a no-no. Swearing in moderation and in the correct context is acceptable, although too many profanities are not allowed. I feel that both of these limits are very good because they allow you to learn by writing frequently. The lack of many restrictions is, in itself, excellent, for you are not bogged down with responsibilities.

It is not difficult to write; it simply takes practice. I have written twenty-three themes and (with the exception of two or three) each has been better than the previous one.

Prior to this course, writing was pretty much unknown to me. Oh sure, I wrote a story here and there, but nothing fantastic. Now, I would be committed to write a theme every week. I was scared and was at a loss as to what I was going to write. But I felt I had an advantage. I knew what a theme was (which some of the other kids did not know). I procrastinated until Thursday night, the evening prior to the day the writing was due. Quickly I wrote, not really caring about what I was writing, only that I would soon be done.

The next day I listened to everyone else's themes and was ashamed, but I knew it was my own fault that my theme was not good. The next week I spent more time writing, mainly for a better grade but a little bit because it wasn't as hard as I suspected.

As the year progressed, so did my writing, and I gained confidence in myself. Now, as I said before, it is mostly pleasurable to write, and sometimes I find myself involved in themes, playing the role of a nearly dead soldier in the Vietnam jungle or a United States intelligence officer working undercover overseas, involved in espionage operations. Writing is no sweat off my brow.

— Tony Pellegrini

I have grown as a writer like a flower has grown from a seed. I started out with a tiny bit of knowledge about writing. I then gradually formed roots which were the basis of all my writing. Soon the leaves unfolded, and a bud began to grow. Gradually the leaves of the flower will open, and the flower will become beautiful.

— Mary McPhillips

As I see myself writing a story or theme, I see myself as a pioneer in a new world, a totally new world of my choice. I know the world by knowing my ideas. I have grown as a writer as I find myself traveling to this new world with more ease. On the journey I learn much more about myself. The world I look at is a window to my mind, allowing me to watch and enjoy and learn though I must journey and be part of this world to in fact learn from it and enjoy it more. Many others journey, and I learn from them also. Writing is truly an adventure. The adventure is only possible if you truly can write down your ideas with quality and if you learn from your own writing and the writing of others.

— Craig Young

PART THREE:

WRITERS . . . GROWING

The first day we began working on this monograph one of the easy student decisions was that overall writing growth could be shown best by including what students consider to be poor themes along with good themes. All students wrote and shared papers resulting from that decision. These revised copies are a selection to reflect the elements individually important to developing writers. Together they summarize what the students hope the monograph has demonstrated.

Scott Johnson explains, **To me it is obvious that I have grown in writing over the years. I think the greatest improvement in my stories is detail. I can write a story now and put color into it. My time that I spend with writing is a great difference. My themes are averaging three pages now, and at the beginning of the year I was lucky to complete a page, and my content was lousy, no imagination at all. In these areas I have improved, but in grammar I am lacking. I still think I should use a bigger vocabulary because mine is so limited. Still I think I'm coming along.**

To support his explanation he includes this theme based on a dream about theme days; certainly detail, color, length, and imagination are clearly present:

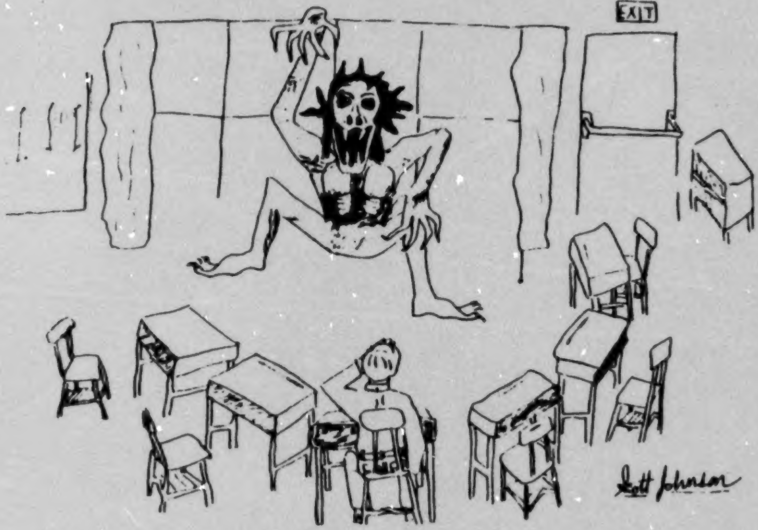
Great Events in Themes

It was 1:45 pm, Friday. The sun was out on this day, and when we walked out of math, we waked into a hall of very Bright, warm yellow, for the sun was shining through the double doors. We waked into Mrs. Marasnio's to Read our themes which we had written the night before. As we walked into the Room of Language, the clothes of the students were ~~were~~ Glowing of Beautiful, Bright Colors. I Looked at the Teacher who was wearing a black pair of pants and a grey top. Her face was not filled with the colors it always had. It was pale, almost gross. I had realized that the beauty of The Room and hall was just a cover up; this day was going to be hell. The Looks of the teacher told me. What a beautiful day out. The sun was shining in the window, the beautiful tall evergreens were swaying a bit from the breeze that was coming from the south. Steven Blinkinsop Read one of his usual unusual themes. Mrs. Marasnio laughed at it as always. This was not Right; everything was too perfect. By now I realized that I was the only one who noticed the too perfect day and the odd Marasnio. After Steve, Amy read an extremely sad theme. Amy Started to cry; Marashio started to laugh. I swallowed hard; I understood what was going on. The other students started to suspect her of something, but only listened to the next theme. Marashio was not the teacher I knew. She had become evil. During the theme all I thought of was her being evil and did not know that she was looking at me as if she or 'it' knew what I was thinking. I looked at her, I swallowed hard, for her eyes had become back and swollen, her nose pig-like. She started to breathe hard as if angered. The sky had changed to gray, the trees blue-gray; the class room became as gray as her top was. The students were even as gray as she. I still had color; my will was greater than the devil.

Mary was reading her theme now, and her voice was loud and unearthly. The kids were not paying any attention, as if the couldn't. Deathly silence filled the room with the voice, not Mary's though through her lips, all that was to be heard. The breeze outside had vanished. My peers had disappeared in thin air; so had the devil. I was sitting all alone with Mary's voice echoing through out the room. Laughter of a man of evil covered up her voice. It was me versus the devil. By now I was yelling my heart out, but I could not speak. Then I looked at my SURROUNDINGS IN horror. The Devil Spoke,"I shall give you ten words to speak; only if I should approve them will you live, Then, only UNDER my power.

I Spoke,"oh Lord Please help me!"

"Stop, you fool, you shall die!" said the devil. Then the devil appeared with such an ugly face I could not bear to look. Then in an instant the devil fell; Marasmo lay on the floor. The students returned; all knew what had happened. The Color came back into the room. The Sun came back out. Mrs. Cohen walked into the room all gray and Black.



Chris Field decided to compare a good theme with a bad one, concentrating particularly on flow and form. She says, **I put my theme "I Wish I Were" in the book because it was nicely formed, and it had good rhymes. When I read the theme to the class, the words just flowed out smoothly. My "Pattern" theme is bad because there wasn't a good form to it. I am putting a comparison of my good and my bad themes in the book to show how bad I used to write and how well I write now.**

Bad theme

Daily Morning Pattern

Every day from Monday through Friday I wake up early in the morning when my big brother Bobby turns on his El-Camino at 6:00 am. The car has long side pipes that make a lot of noise.

Then I take a bath and wash my hair. After I blow dry my hair, I curl it. Then I get dressed. I eat breakfast, brush my teeth, get my books and pocket book. Throw on my shoes, then at quarter to eight I catch the little bus to drive to one bustop. Then wait for the big bus to go to school. That's what I do every school day, which forms a pattern

Good theme

I wish I were

I wish I were the moon so I could shine all night, so everybody could see me shineing on so bright,

I wish I were the sun so I could shine all day, to do what ever I please or what ever I may.

I wish I were a star floating out in space, with no interruptions and nothing to take my place,

I wish I were a bird gliding in the sky, flying up ever so high.

The best thing I would like to be is a cloud as fluffy as can be, when people look up I'd be shapes they want to see.

Each of these things is good to be, because they are something you look up to see.

by: Chris Field
(Christine Lynn Field)

Follow-through is Patty Buzynski's concern: My worst theme doesn't follow through. The topic was "Time Is" and I used a clock as an example, then changed the idea on the next set of verses. The beginning and ending didn't agree; the ending was about what time has brought and doesn't have anything to do with a clock. My best theme was about child abuse. It showed how little things in the beginning lead up for a good ending. The theme could be better if I fixed it up, but the ideas are pretty much clear the way they are. I think I have grown as a writer because I know more about writing now. I know what kind of stories I can write best, and I can see patterns from other themes.

Time is...

Time is like a clock
Which ticks on forever.
Will the clock stop?
No it won't, ever.

People say time goes by;
They don't know
Time stays;
We go.

The time in our lives
Includes decisions and thoughts.
When we look back
We can see what time has brought.

Patty Buzynski

She laid on her bed—still, scared, and crying. Her mother had beaten her again. Ever since her mother's father died, her mother's temper got worse and worse each time. Sue couldn't take it anymore. She went outside to think things over while walking down the road. She didn't want to tell anyone about her mother because she loved her mother too much. Still, she didn't want to live anymore. Why should she? There was nothing to live for. Sue let out a heavy sigh and went home. Whene she got home, she went straight to her room and decided to go to sleep. Everything will be okay in the morning, but it just got worse.

When she woke up the next morning, her arms were sore. They were covered with bruises. She decided to wear a long sleeved shirt to cover them up. Sue had an uneasy feeling all through the day that something terrible was going to happen. The feeling was with her still at supper. Her mother told her to clear the table. accidentally a dish dropped breaking into

a thousand pieces, scattering
all over the floor. Her mother
screamed and slapped her. She
ran out of the room and opened her father's closet. She
reached for the gun without
hesitating. Within a second,
the sound of the gun echoed
through the night accompanying the cry of her pains
and miseries.

Patty Buzynski

To Maureen Moynihan content, meaning, is the key to improvement in writing: My worst theme was "A Portrait Of Myself As A Writer." The theme does not focus on the same point, and the content is poor. The theme also has no real meaning; even the beginning and ending do not relate that well. My best theme was on the topic "A Link," a link of friendship. I was able to relate to the subject easily. I could find the right words to say what I felt. Comparing these two themes I could see my weakness and strengths. Now I find it easier to search for an idea for a theme, and I sometimes am able to catch my own mistakes. I still need a lot more improvement in the areas of wording, putting ideas together, and I still make careless mistakes. I'm trying hard to correct these mistakes and trying to become a better writer than I was in the beginning of the year.

The time is late on
a Thursday night,

And I cannot think
of a theme to write

I know that it's due
first thing in the morning

I know it didnt come
without a warning.

I sit and I sit
uncluttering my mind

I search and I search
for the right words to find

I think of a poem,
but the words won't rhyme.

I think of a story, but
I've run out of time

But still I sit, on this
cold Thursday night.

And at last I've found
a theme to write.
-Maureen
Moynihan

The link of a friendship
is a hard link to hold

It can be warm and
friendly, or it can be cold.

One friend says something,
not meaning to say.

Then the other turns
mad, right away.

Soon there's bickering and
fighting and one lonely
heart
Then the link
is torn apart

There's gossiping, screaming
and cold, dirty lies

Insults, hurt feelings, until
one cries

The tears roll down
a sad, lonely face

If only you could turn
back the pages,
and slow
down the pace.

But yesterday is gone
and months soon pass

Then one of them says
"I'm sorry" at last.

The tears are gone, the
heart will soon mend

Then the chain is
complete once again

-Maureen Moynihan

Kerry Culleton is working on expanding a meaning into a story. She explains, **Before I got into eighth grade, I could make up good stories. Now by listening to comments and other people's stories, I can get ideas on what people like to hear. I've opened that window to my mind a little wider, and I have a better imagination span.**

"Vic"

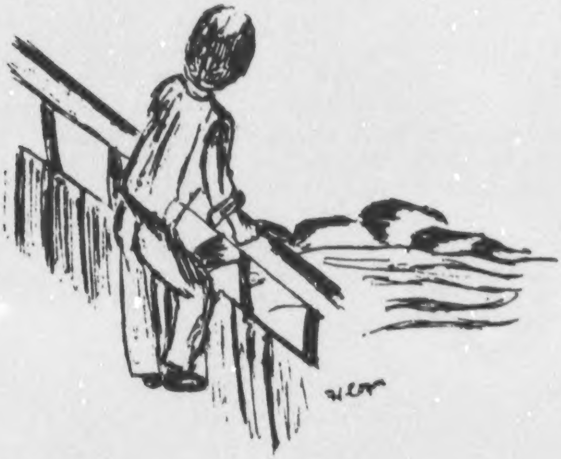
Victor Mitchell was a boy who had two older brothers and three older sisters. Even though Vic's 13 everyone, relatives & friends still called him "a baby." Vic only had a mother. His father died of a heart attack soon after Vic was born. —

— One day when Vic's mother was working her usual 8:30 to 5:30 pm. schedule his brothers started teasing him and calling him; "chicken." The reason why is because John and

Nic usually smoked pot and sometimes took pills, and they thought Vic should. Usually Vic always refused that kind of stuff but that day June 8, 1979 was different. When John, the oldest, offered him a joint in their backyard Vic quickly took it out of his hand and started smoking it. He found he liked it very much.

A couple of days later he asked John for more. To his request John got more dope, however not only that, but some — speed! Vic was the first one to take some; he only took 1 pill

Suddenly Vic said he felt funny, but he seemed very happy. Quickly Vic got up and ran. John, trying to keep up, ran after him. They soon came to the bridge. A bridge



not often used but for small cars. Vic jumped up on the guardrail and started losing his balance. The river underneath was flowing quickly and with a strong current. Vic started yelling, "I'ts hot. I'm going for a swim," and jumped. John ran down the bank and tried to save him, but it was too late, the current toom him away and.

he did not come up.

After the Michells came home from the special service at church for Vic, John walked to the bridge. He started crying. He knew if he had not been so stupid Vic would still be alive and healthy. In John's blurred vision from tears he looked across the bank and saw a red bandana, the one Vic was wearing before he jumped. John went over, picked it up, and held it to his heart, then carefully folded it and put it in his pocket.
- He slowly walked home.

The End!

Kerry [illegible]

Details, form, and expanding meaning demand more and more concentration on organization, as Holly Rozen explains: **To help me grow as a writer I wrote down all my thoughts on a piece of paper. I read it over and organized it. This would be my rough draft. I'd read it over again to see if there were any mistakes; if so I'd correct them. After that I'd copy it on another piece of paper; this would be my final copy. At the beginning of the year I didn't do this. I had to make a habit of it. Also I learned how to express my thoughts more clearly because I've listened to other people's comments towards my themes.**

"Scared Stiff"

Your walking in a dark alley, when you hear footsteps in back of you.

You turn around and see a guy in a dark black leather coat with dark eyes with glowing terror in them.

You see an awesome switchblade in his hand, you pray to God he isn't going to use that on you.

You want to ask him what he's going to do with the swithblade but you to scared to ask him.

But suddenly you blurt out "Hey whats' ya'gona' do, there nobody here except you and me. so what is ya' doin' provin' ta' me you're a man?" You suddenly take a big gulp not sure of what you just said.

He grabs your shirt and pushes you towards a wall.

The look in his eyes go through your skin, you try not to show your scared, but you can't help it. You hear him say "Get lost you punky kid. and rememba' ya' neva' saw me agai'!

He lets go of your shirt as he backs off. you take off and run, never turning back. You can feel your heart pounding against your chest as you run home through the dark eerie night.

Holly Rogers

Alyssa Arrigo is concerned with developing her own ability to improve her writing, rather than depending on others: **I can clearly see when I look back upon my past themes how and what I have improved upon such as proper beginnings and endings, who's telling the story, building and descending in proper fashion. All of these improvements have come as a result in class when we discussed errors in our themes. For example, I would take mental notes while we discussed errors. When a person orally read a theme, we would pick out spots in it that the class thought were troublesome. Example, one of my themes ended on a detail. In class we discussed how I could fix it and also make it**

fit with the beginning. Also when Mrs. Marashio corrected our themes, she would make notes on my papers. Of course, almost everyone learns from mistakes like I did in improving my writing.

No School, for the Windham, Area due to the snow storm," announced the radio. "Oh, great," I said and zipped to the phone to call Gail, (age 13) my neighbor. Right in the middle of the ring she answered, (I could tell her voice.)

"Hello," said Gail.

"Gail, this is Maggie; do you want to go sledding?"

"OK," said Gail.

"How about if I meet you in the back of your house, at the biggest hills foot." said Maggie

"Fine," said Gail, "See Ya!"

I hung up the phone and hustled into my clothes. Then, I jumped into my ski suit.

Running out the door, I grabbed my red sled.

Finally, I was at the foot of the biggest hill, in Gail's back-yard. I looked up the hill and there a the top was Gail and her older sister Mary about age 14½, behind her.

Mary has a tendency to hang around us when she was board.

"Hey Gail," I called to her. "Are you crazy or something you guys cant sled down that hill; its to steep. We just agreed to meet here."

"Maggie," said Gail "your such a chicken and besides I'm not sledding down with Mary."

" Mary, stop her," I yelled, but it was to late. As soon as she started down the hill she went over a camoflaged rock; she went one way - the sled another. I saw her toppling body flying through the air, going straight down the hill. Her once straight erect body, was now twisted and bloody. She had ~~fallen~~ landed on her face right in front of ~~her~~ me....

Mary started screaming, at me ~~and~~ as she climbed down the massive hill. "~~Why~~" Why, Why did you let her do it," screamed Mary.

I just stood there looking down at my sued boots, that had blood stains on them. I stepped back in fear of fear.

Mary came rushing over to her sister with the sled she had evidently grabbed on the way down the hill. She turned her sisters body over; I couldn't look, not at Mary nor her sister. I could ~~hear her~~ Mary crying and fumbling with her sister's probably dead body to place in the sled.

"Look," Mary said in a disturbed voice, "Look what you've done!"

I turned away, Mary dragged the sled that contained her sisters ~~dead~~ body home (~~as~~ if nothing ~~had ever happened~~.) And I dragged my own body home (as if nothing ever happened.)

Alyssa Arrigo

For Kathy Kerton audience became the key ingredient in her writing growth: **When I first started writing, just about every theme was so boring my peers would just about fall asleep. I found that the stories I wrote weren't what the kids really liked. They were stories about kids doing weird things. For instance, my very first theme was about a girl**

who wanted to find out who ate all of the cookies her mom made. Everyone found that theme boring.

The Missing Cookies

Jane had just come home from school and decided to have some cookies that her mom had baked that morning. She lifted off the lid to the cookie jar and found out they were all gone.

She got really furious and asked her mom who ate all of the cookies. Her mom said, "No one did. There is a whole bunch left. Jane told her that there weren't any left. Her mom got really upset.

Jane was determined to find out who ate all of the cookies and decided to play detective. First she got all of the facts and wrote them down on paper. Then she questioned all of her family, but no one admitted eating all of the cookies. So then she decided to search the bedrooms for crumbs. She had checked every bedroom in the house except her little brother's room. When she walked in, she saw crumbs all over the floor and bed. Then she was almost certain he had eaten them. She showed everyone in her family the clue she had found in his room.

after confronting him with the evidence, he admitted that he had eaten every cookie. As a punishment his mom made him go without cookies for a long time.

Kathy Kenton

Now I write what people on my age level like or can relate to. A more recent theme was about a girl who ran away because she was under too much pressure. She hitchhiked anywhere she could. My classmates found this one pretty exciting. It kind of kept them in suspense as it went along. They probably liked it because they hear about things like that every day. I've found that if I write about what people can related to on my level, I do better and they like it more. I've learned from my previous themes and have grown in writing greatly.

I just have to leave here wrote Sally in her diary. I'm under too much pressure all of the time. My parents pressure me and so don't the people in school. It's just too much for me too handle. Maybe if I run away, I won't be under so much pressure. That's what I'll do, I'll run away.

She sat on her bed awhile thinking of where she could go. When she finally decided, she closed her diary. Sally had decided to just go from place to place so no one could find her.

February seventh finally came. It was the day that she had picked to run away on. She had planned everything out just right so no one would realize she was gone until school was let out.

Sally packed a few important things in her knapsack which she lugged to school everyday. Then she left the house.

She had the knapsack on her back as she reached the highway. Sally kept walking with her thumb sticking out, waiting to get a ride. At last a car started slowing down She started having second thoughts about getting a ride. The car finally caught up to her and stopped. Then the guy in the car rolled down his window and asked where she was heading. Sally told him, and he said to get in if she wanted. She did get in and then the car sped off.

After awhile, the car stopped and Sally got out. "Thanks", she said as she shut the door.

Mean while at home, her parents were getting upset, wondering where she could be. They had called all of Sally's friends, but they said that they hadn't seen her. Then they decided to call the police, but the police couldn't do anything until she was missing forty eight hours or more.

"What'll we do to find her?" "What if she's in trouble?" wailed her mother.

Sally kept getting ride upon ride, going from one place to another. She had just gotten dropped off when another car stopped and picked her up. They rode for awhile. Then she realized he wasn't driving the right way.

"Hey, this isn't where I told you I was heading! Let me out!"

The next day Sally was found dead on the side of the street that she and the guy had driven on. Apparently she had been beaten and stabbed to death

Kathy [illegible]

Kim Spofford increased her own involvement in what she writes and grew through that involvement: **The best theme I ever wrote was called "The Popularity Contest." It was very easy for me to write because I see the actions of the popular people every day at school. It was very descriptive, and it was a good idea that was developed a lot. I started off the first sentence telling what my ideas were about, all the while making it rhyme. In the end I did not end on a detail. I kept the same tense all the way through. Things didn't contradict each other. I stayed on the subject all the way through, and I enjoyed writing it.**

The Popularity Contest - best theme
I used to sit and wonder
I'd often wonder why,
what makes some so popular
and what makes some so shy.

Is it because they're fancy
cheerleaders
Or have been on Center
School sports teams.
Maybe they are in a club
or a brain to some extreme

Maybe they won the spelling
bee,
Maybe they won the science
fair

They seem to brush off
the shy seeming not to care.
But if, one goes afer a
boyfriend/girlfriend boy they
really flair.

But now I never wonder
I never wonder why
what makes some so popular
and what makes some so shy

Some may be good in
sports
Some may be brains
But most of them.
are good people to
the best extreme!

My worst theme was called "A Pattern." It was also the first theme I ever wrote. In the beginning I strayed from the subject, and I had a lot of contradictions in it. I just listed the ideas in any order, not bothering to read it after. I wrote it in examples. At first I wrote about school; then all of a sudden I wrote about different shapes. In the end the idea was not the same as it was in the beginning. I also wrote it to get it over with. I did it on a Thursday night at about 9:00 p.m., and it was due the next day. I thought the topic was boring and that themes were dumb.

A Pattern - Worst Theme

A Pattern is like a
design.
it goes in a certain
order.

There are all types
of patterns.

Maybe even at
school

It may be in math
like when you do a problem

Or maybe in science
when you do a lab

maybe some are like circles
some even like squares

There's a certain pattern
for everything.
but we may not
know it just yet.

Billy Grinley moved one more step, from involvement to honesty: I feel that this is my best theme because before I wrote it I was covering up my feelings. On this theme I let my feelings come forth through the mental barrier that had made me feel as though I might be laughed at by the other students.

Do you remember when Daddy said "I love you" and he meant it? Oh he meant it allright! We had so much fun with just the three of us. We went everywhere together; we were so inseparable. Oh we had such a good time. You got married when I was six, and you loved one another so very much. Dad said his love for and

I would never smoulder. Yet
it seems like only yesterday, and
now he's gone. He said he
doesn't love you anymore and
he means it : alright.

Billy Grinley

Janet Chartrain includes involvement, honesty, and the need to communicate to others the importance of accepting her view: The theme I picked was my favorite; it was the one titled "Lisa." It was about my friend who was mentally retarded and the point that sometimes we don't care about anyone but ourselves. I picked it because it has a moral that almost everyone can understand, and it means quite a lot to me.

Lisa

I awoke to a startling buzz, from the alarm clock, telling me it was 7:00 and time to get ready for the yearly family outing. I groaned, rolled over, and turned off the alarm I slipped on a t-shirt and a pair of old faded Levi's I went down stairs, pored a bowl of cheerios and read the side of the box.

Some say you learn something every day, well cheerios has 110 calories an ounce and 190 with half a cup of vitamin D milk.

When I got to Niacin I was joined by two family members. I soon ate all the little o's and scraped the bottom for any sugar that had sunk. Not finding much I put the bowl in the dishwasher, then got my coat. I walked out to the car to wait for my parents, sister, and brother.

After a forty five minute drive we found the place of the outing. Everyone there was happy, laughing and bringing up old memories, but one girl, she was leaning against the fence, kicking around the newly laid gravel. She was so alone. No one wanted to be with her, she was Mentaly Retarded. people were to ignorant to think about how she felt, even I, at first.

Soon we were all roasting hot dogs over an open fire, all except that girl. By 2:00 the sun had dried all the due from the night before, so we all were ready for the field day events. The three legged race was first. After eating two hot dogs, I didn't feel like playing so I decided to sit and watch.

Then the girl started to cry, just a quiet wimper. I turned around and stared. It wasn't her fault, she wanted to be normal, only we didn't like her because she was different.

She slowly lifted her head and I tryed to concentrate on the little chipmunk gathering nuts for its winter use.

Feeling bad For the girl I walked up to her, dragging my feet so not to startle her I asked if she wanted to eater the next race. She knodded, wiped her tear stained face. and put a smile on from ear to ear. Something in side me felt so good.

I grabed her had and we walked to the starting line. The man with the wistle gave me an old rag, so I tied our legs together. When I stood up the girl said"I'm Lisa, will you be my friend." I said it would be a pleasure..

For the rest of the outing I stayed with Lisa, at First out of pity, but in the end because I liked her.

We had to leave shortly after I accepted Lisa as a person. The whole ride home I thought about what I had learned, it was much greater than how many calories is in a box of cheerios.

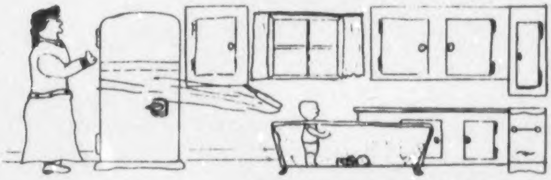
Tired I got into bed, set my alarm clock for seven, and fell asleep thinking about how much in my life I take for granted.

Janet Chartrain

Joanne Groetzinger echoes Janet's need to communicate and turns that communication to focus readers on themselves: My good theme

involves the people's attention. It makes them think about themselves. I wrote about a bad dream I had for the longest time. I thought the theme was very descriptive; it was emotional. It described the way I felt. The theme was something I saw when I was younger and had remembered for all these years. My theme involves what I felt. I compared it to a puzzle. It shows the confusion and pain I went through, how scared I was but told nobody. The beginning tells how old I was and what to focus on. The middle of the story shows how I figured out this dream with all the information I found. Then it tells after understanding that dream I get another. I said what I thought of these dreams which was how they attached to each other. I think the ending tells it all. It shows the way I felt about the beginning of my life and my hope to get a happy ending and future.

Ever since I was four I had a bad dream. What I saw in my dream was a tall person beating a baby and a little boy near the baby saying don't cry. I also saw a hot pan of water flying across the room and hitting the baby who I now could see was a little girl. The baby kept crying so the tall person hit the baby because she was crying. After seeing that, I'd wake up and grab my blanket and be terrified, then go back to sleep and never told anybody till now. As the years went by, I started to get information about my past but not enough to solve the dream.



I wasn't old enough to understand. I always looked at the mark on my arm but thought nothing of it. Then I figured it out. I thought of the dream and the mark and started to get a funny feeling inside. I knew that the dream had to be true in some parts but what parts? Now that I'm fifteen I know most of the truth about my past and know that the dreams were true and why I had them. That dream no longer haunts me all the time because I understand some of the past, but it comes back sometimes. Now I figured out this dream. I get a new dream. To me all these dreams are a puzzle. You get one piece then fit it somewhere. Then you get another piece and attach them all together. One of these days the puzzle will be solved, and hopefully those dreams I have will be over and get a happy ending not a sad ending like the very beginning of my life.

Joanne [illegible]

Instead of focusing the reader inside the self, Pam Wojas moves inside her subject to emphasize the importance of point of view: **I picked Theme #18 because it is my favorite theme. The tone and the message are well matched. It gives a different side of death and is given from Death's point of view.**

Death

Pleased to meet you; my name is Death
I'll take your life with just one breath
One false move, and you're in your grave;

Don't try nothing fancy or nothing brave
There comes a time when we gotta meet
It's like walking down an unknown street
You never know whats at the end,
But you sure do know Death ain't your friend
You can't avoid me, and you can't hide;
I'm all around you on every side
I might take it easy; I might do it slow,
But One way or the other you gotta go
One day soon you must depart
And never again hear the beat of your heart.

Seeing subjectively with these student eyes is instructive. In their writing growth the impact of specific elements is being internalized as each student accepts the importance of the element to his or her own writing. These students, supposedly of different abilities and definitely at different stages of their writing growth, are working to define themselves as student writers. As Chris Pas shows, that personal involvement seems to underly the growth process for each student:

Portrait of myself as a writer.

I make time to talk,
To ease my mind and all
my aggravation.

I take the time to listen,
so I may learn and further
my education.

I make time to laugh,
so I can add humor to
my writing.

I take time to understand,
so my words can be
enlightening.

I take the time to live,
for life is overflowing
with things to see.

Last, but never least, I make
time to love,
for love is what makes
a writer... me.

Christine Pas

The "I" growing is not enough though, as Craig Young explains: **Perhaps as I sit down to write I have grown. My idea of writing before was that it was boring and was not necessary in society today because society was scientific and into mathematics. When I started to write, I realized that writing was necessary. Writing is a way to put your ideas, emotions, and experiences down to make them evident to all of society, making people more wise from learning and listening to them.**

Learning from and listening to themes has become important enough to this eighth grade that they requested Center School's first Team Reading. All of the 117 students and five teachers on the eighth grade team sat in a huge circle in the gym and spent a happy afternoon sharing themes; the sixth grade reading teacher and the assistant principal also joined us for a while, with their themes in hand of course.

In this monograph we have tried to be open and honest, to include the varying views of all who are willing to share them. Yet in many ways how students grow as writers remains a mystery, even to them. They see and show the *what* of their growth and sometimes the *why*, but the *how* contains gaps that they explain as "it just happened" or "suddenly...." Their changes from students writing to student writers can be written about only tentatively and with hesitation until they, as the experiencers inside the process, can articulate more.

I have no hesitation, however, about suggesting that the real value of this monograph is the process the students and I shared together. The students not only attempted to link their experience as writers with what writing really is, but in that process they also participated in what writing can be. We no longer simply share my past knowledge of writing; their writing has produced new awarenesses for all of us. In writing this monograph together, the students and I are attempting to articulate our merging of writing experiences so that such experiences can be embodied for and then by you as readers.

N. Scott Momaday articulates this process clearly in *The Names.* Viewing a painting created by his father, he muses:

> ...I see how it is that you proceed, that I am involved in this work, that you create a thing and it exists before my eyes, that in so doing

> you determine my point of view and confirm that I see and I am, that therefore you create me, too. (p. 152)

I suggest that what he articulates should evolve as the center for students and teachers of writing. As students write about writing, they create out of what had seemed nothing to them. They begin to fit pieces of meanings together; pain and beauty and power and violence take shape through their writing. As they write about how they make those shapes, students learn their own control as formers, as shapers, as writers.

And as such writers Center School's eighth graders produced this work to share. Having entered into writing, they emerged both changed and as potential changers of future writers who see this ***Writing: A Window To Our Mind.***

Appendix A

THEME DAY AT WINDHAM CENTER SCHOOL: FACULTY VIEWS

Because our writing process is reaching so obviously beyond the Language Arts classroom, we asked not only the eighth grade teachers but also the guidance counselor and our assistant principal to share their impressions of theme developments with our readers. Their responses indicate both strengths and weaknesses worth considering.

Over the years participation in Mrs. Marashio's Friday theme class has become a rite of passage for high-school-bound eighth graders. It has become a sort of educational confirmation for hundreds of adolescents.

I see these themes encouraging an imaginative use of language. Many of the themes are read to their peers and because of this audience, students want to express themselves in ways that are unique or humorous. Often the expressions generated in themes will spread to become part of a school-wide vocabulary.

Pupils also see themes as a forum to air intimate personal or group problems. Eighth grade is a volatile time for adolescents, and students need to express their fears and frustrations in order to discover that they are not alone in feeling the way they do. However, sometimes after these heart-wrenching themes are read, there is an emotional fallout that spreads into the next class or throughout the whole day. This fallout may disrupt the learning process. It's hard to teach when half the class sits before you in tears. So pupils have to be occasionally reminded by us that problems at home, however unfortunate, cannot be used as an excuse for not learning or trying their best here at school.

Fortunately this fallout seldom happens, and the emotional benefits derived from writing weekly about things that mean a great deal outweigh any temporary educational losses.

—Philip Manna
Science

During my first year at Windham my impressions of theme day were mostly negative. It seemed a constant irritation as students tried desperately to complete their themes before entering Room 1. They argued bitterly if their paper was taken as I attempted to get them back to their math.

The situation changed in the next year. The previous problem lessened as I now had classes after language instead of just before, but a new and more perplexing one replaced it. This year's class became so emotional after themes that, in one class in particular, a large section of the class missed math each Friday as they spent the period somewhere else discussing and comforting one another while trying to stem the flow of tears. This time of consolation on many occasions continued into the next period so the students in effect lost the remainder of the day as far as academics were concerned.

In the next year and a half (which brings us to the present) neither of the above has been a large problem. That fact, I suppose, along with the sharing of insights gained through themes, my observations of students' reactions to themes, and their own comments about them have led to other impressions that I feel are equally important.

Mainly I see themes as an opportunity for a person to express feelings, ideas, and opinions that may not have another outlet. Because some of these are private or emotionally hard to share, the option of not having to read aloud is extremely important. Also the choice of writing on an assigned topic or one of the student's own choosing allows the possibility of this free expression.

The handling of any emotionally charged or controversial themes seems pivotal. The manner in which discussions are handled will determine the measure of help or harm that is accomplished.

The ability to recognize the difference between fact and fantasy, truth and exaggeration, or an unconscious (or conscious) seeking for help and manipulation seem essential in the leader.

As for the students, some see theme day as a day free of work in language class. Some express the dislike of the work necessary to produce a good theme, or their difficulty in writing a theme each week or finding a topic.

There are still students who do last minute work on the way to class, but others work early and hard to produce something that they will be proud to read. I see pride in writing done by themselves and pride in the work of their classmates.

My own feelings are mixed on the issue of two years past where students missed later classes. There is a definite need in some students for help, but are we doing more harm than good in permitting them to miss classes to try to handle problems which may be too large for them to cope with alone? Much also seems to depend on the students in each class, their personalities, problems, and maturity level.

I definitely feel that theme day is not for every teacher. But, in the right hands, it can be an excellent tool to open a new world for students—one which they might enjoy for a lifetime.

—Jeanne Cohen
Mathematics

It is a well known fact that if you are an eighth grader at Center School you are also a weekly theme writer. Not only do you write themes, but you share your work orally with your peers. For the new eighth grader, this is just cause for total panic. They start off the year having no idea what to expect. The first weeks are the toughest. I constantly hear moans and groans from students unsure about what to write. Those first weeks I'm consistantly asked to read numerous themes and comment on their content. Self-confidence is almost non-existent. As the weeks go by, a change begins to take place. Instead of complaints I begin to hear eager voices sharing their themes with each other. Students of all abilities begin to take part in the enjoyment of writing. As their writing matures, students begin to pick subjects that interest them or are important to their development. Since thirteen can be a year of confusing issues, many of the writers choose topics that touch on their anger, fears, and frustrations. They use their theme writing to work through current and past problems, and they consistantly seek feedback from their peers. They learn to respect the feelings and viewpoints of their peers regardless of how the person fits into their unique social order.

A possible drawback of theme writing that I have observed is that some students are not ready for the introspection that theme writing may encourage, or they may go overboard and use it too intensely in seeking out their inner selves.

I have seen many positive strengths as a result of weekly themes. Certainly it has an enormous effect on the mechanics of writing, but it also teaches students so much about themselves and others.

—Judi Kryzynski
Reading

My first contact with themes came at the end of my first week of teaching at Windham. The students were rushing around asking each other if they had finished their themes. I had to ask one of my students what they were *talking about. Although they were rushing around, they seemed to be enjoying it.*

I guess this is the most important reason why themes are valuable. Students seem to look forward to writing them each week. Most students do take the time to sit down and try to express themselves on a piece of paper.

I believe it is important for students at this age to start thinking and expressing how they feel about certain topics. Themes allow for this self-expression. Students are at an age when they are feeling and coming to grips with many different things in their lives, and they need to share them with others.

From a social studies teacher's point of view, I would like to see the students apply the writing skills they are developing to essays on papers and exams in my class. Many of them need to transfer these skills to other areas of study.

—Craig Tashjian
Social Studies

The curriculum for eighth grade Language Arts is known to students before the year begins. The practice the students receive in writing themes is an invaluable experience to their future education. The year-long process of writing weekly provides the students with the confidence they need for later written assignments.

The structure of reading their ideas to their classmates provides positive peer interaction that is so needed at this age. The support provided by the class gives the student the opportunity to take risks with issues that have concerned him or her. For example, one student was able to share with her classmates her feelings about being called names by some of the others. The class responded not only with empathy at the time, but also with a change in their behavior toward her.

One liability in the process of theme writing may occur if a student is not ready or able to cope with an issue that is assigned. Although a student has the choice of writing on a different topic, the issue is still present in the themes and discussions of other classmates. This difficulty can be handled by a sensitive teacher who can be alerted to the reactions and feelings of her students. For all students, the themes provide a forum for reassurance that their adolescent concerns are "normal" and safe.

The overall experience of writing, sharing, and discussing themes builds trust and an interaction necessary to the development of this age group.

—Judy Weiner
Guidance

Writing is a practical and necessary form of communication, it is an art form when done well, and for many students it is a very unpleasant experience. It certainly is obvious that many young people do not write well. There is a wide variety of reasons for this problem, one of which is the lack of good teaching in some schools. Teachers often make writing a terrible chore. Very often the writing assignments lack any real purpose other than generating a grade to be recorded in the rank book. The student composes what he or she is asked to, the teacher reads, corrects, assigns a grade, and passes the composition back to the student. Those who have been fortunate to learn to write well do well, and those who cannot write well never learn.

Nancy Marashio's approach to writing is unique in many ways and accomplishes a great deal more than just teaching students to write. She gets them excited about writing. It is something they look forward to doing and something they do well. She does what every good teacher should do; she teaches her students to think. They learn how to learn and in the process they learn much about themselves. In many ways their writing is a discovery process.

I have had the opportunity not only to observe the writing classes but to participate in them, first as a classroom teacher and now as an administrator. Each week students gather together and read their weekly themes to the class. Each theme is discussed by the class, and it is this process that I believe is the key to the success of the class. Students are tough critics and often terribly honest. Their input is essential for the growth of the writing process. Nancy deftly directs this complex process and draws out of each individual those talents that have been left dormant for many years.

The students put a lot into their writing. Some of their themes are very personal and reflect the students in various ways. They learn much about one another, themselves, and the dynamics of group interaction. They learn to process their thoughts, organize them, and write them in a meaningful and technically correct manner. These classes have given me the opportunity to see students in a different light, and they have seen me as someone other than a teacher or principal.

—Steve Plocharczyk
Assistant Principal

Appendix B

GEOFFREY

by Lara Chulack

It was a crisp, late November morning; the frost covered the bottom edge of the glass window panes. Peering through the window, my warm breath fogged and melted the white frost. I watched the icy droplets roll down and get caught in the grooves of the wooden border. With a sigh I got up from my comfortable window seat and walked still half asleep across the cold tile floor. Reaching the closet, I cautiously opened the big oak door so as not to wake the children. I grabbed my plush robe off its hanger and lazily lumbered into it. Slipping my feet into a pair of worn scuffs, I made my way out into the dim, drafty hall. Tip-toeing past my little son Geoffrey's room, I peeked in to see him snuggled up in his patchwork quilt still asleep.

I remember the day he was born. All bundled up in the same patchwork quilt, he lay sleeping in the nursery room bed, his eyes tightly shut so that his beautiful black eyelashes lay pressed against his upper cheek. He was the talk of all the nurses in the maternity ward, and each and everyone of them grew to love him in their own special way. He was a beautiful baby. Dave, my husband and I were so terribly pleased at him being a boy, for ever since our two daughters, Tara and Michelle, were born we had wanted a son. When all seemed bright and perfect, disaster fell upon us. Dr. Richards, Geoffrey's pediatrician diagnosed him to be a diabetic.

I was awakened out of this faraway state by my daughter Tara's cool hand on my shoulder. "What's the matter mommie?" she asked. "Oh, nothing sweetheart, I was just thinking." Getting up I put my arm around her and shushed her quickly out of the room. Shutting the door behind us, we each went our separate ways, she to her room to get ready for school and I downstairs for some coffee. Reaching the bottom of the stairs, I noticed the front door slightly ajar. Walking towards it I tied the belt of my robe tightly around me, for the opening was letting in drafts of winter air. I opened the door to see if anything might be stuck in there as the cause of the opening. Yes, there was the mail. Picking up the small pile of envelopes I shut the door and walked sheepishly into the dark kitchen. I flicked the lights on then looked around, half expecting to see something wrong in there too. Noticing nothing out of the ordinary, I started the coffee brewing in the coffee maker then settled down in a chair at the end of the table to read the morning mail. Scanning through the little heap, I came across 3 bills, a letter from Dave's parents, a postcard from my sister in Florida and then I noticed a small tan enevelope. It was addressed to both Dave and I. Tearing it open, I read:

> Dear Mr. and Mrs. Morrison
>
> I would just like to remind you that your son, Geoffrey has a scheduled routine check-up on the Thursday of this week, Nov. 6th.
>
> Dr. James A. Richards
> pediatrician
> Southvale Medical
> Center

I slowly refolded the letter and placed it back in the enevelope for Dave to read.

Getting up, I poured myself a cup of coffee. Then I walked to the bottom of the stairs to warn Tara to hurry or she'd be late and miss the bus. Sitting back down I slowly rose, the steaming cup to my lips and took a long sip, letting the warmth spread throughout me. Staring into space my mind was on that letter; how I dreaded those monthly check-ups. Each one, since the first detection of the disease, had gone fairly well. Maybe my luck was running low, I thought. Just thinking of this started a few tears to form in my eyes. Wiping them away, I promised myself that whatever happens I'd be strong.

Tara then came and stood in the doorway, wearing her new birthday jumper and paten leather shoes. "How do I look mommie?" she asked lifting up the hem of the jumper in a curtsey like position. "Lovely," I exclaimed, and she smiled; that was just what she wanted to hear. She jumped up on a side chair as I poured her a bowl of fruity pebbles. Sitting it in front of her, I sat down to finish my coffee. During the silence I let my thoughts drift back to the subject of Geoffrey. Almost as if Tara were reading my mind she broke the silence and asked, "Mommie do you think Geoffrey's gonna be ok?" Stroking her hair I assured her that as long as he knows that we love him and are standing by him it will give him strength, and yes, he'd be ok. She smiled at me then with a mouth full of cereal, and I smiled back.

Getting up I dumped the rest of my coffee down the drain and helped Tara with her coat and boots. Hurring her out to meet the bus, I handed her her snoopy lunchbox and gave her a quick peck on the forehead. I quickly shut the door behind her and scuffed lazily back into the kitchen. Just as I was about to clean up Tara's mess the phone rang. I picked it up on the second ring as Geoffrey came toddling through the doorway the pants of his PJ's slightly drooping. Rubbing his eyes and yawning, he climbed up on a chair. Our voices must have awakend him I thought.

Hanging up the phone, I told him that that was Mrs. Robinson asking if he'd like to come over and play with her little son Todd. They had just moved into the neighborhood, and Geoffrey and Todd had met during nursery school. Geoffrey said ok. That would be better than having to bring him along while I xmas shop, I said to myself.

Pouring his cereal, I asked him how he was feeling today, while I glanced over to see his reaction to the question.......there was none. All he said was, "fine." I sighed out loud. Placing the bowl in front of him, I grabbed the novel I was reading off the kitchen counter and opened it up to where I left off. It was the start of another November day, and all seemed fine.

Part Two

Geoffrey was in his room getting dressed when I called him for the third time to hurry up, because I didn't want to be late for my hair dresser's appointment. Slowly, fumbling down the stairs I noticed Geoffrey to be a little pale. Usually I would have made him stay home at the first suspicion of sickness, but being so excited about the planned day that I just brushed it off to be lack of sleep. Helping him on with his coat, I checked the back door to make sure it was locked. In leaving, I noticed he kept wiping his brow; asking him about this I was answered that he was sweating because of all the clothes I made him wear. I replied it was for his own good so he wouldn't catch cold. We got into the car. I fastened the seatbelt around he and myself, then turned the ignition. Luckily, it started this morning, thank-God; just what I'd need right now would be for our 71 Chevy to conk out on me. Since the Robinson house was just a block down the road, we were there in about two minutes. Unbuckling his seat belt, I let him out and told him to have a fun time. Mrs. Robinson knew I'd be out shopping till about 2:30, and then I'd pick him up so I didn't need to go in. Anyway I was in a rush. Sighing, I backed out the driveway and sped down the road. It felt good to be able to shop freely without any kids around to worry me.

Arriving at the Burkley Mall after my hair dressing appointment, I went straight to Papa Gino's for some pizza; I was starved. After ordering I sat down in a window booth with my number ticket and watched the bustling, hub-bub world beyond me.

Letting my thoughts drift from the passing peoples' shoes to how hungry I was, to xmas and then to Geoffrey, I suddenly felt a pang of worry hit me. I wondered what was going on at Mrs. Robinson's house. Had he had lunch? Had he worn the proper clothing for outdoor playing? Was he feeling allright? Was he behaving? Then my number being broadcast over the mike snapped me out of my worried daze.

Picking up my small pizza and coke, I sat back down and started eating.

Meanwhile....Mrs. Robinson was in a extreme state of panic. Geoffrey was lying on the couch shaking while sweat poured from all over his body, he was unable to speak or think straight. Mrs. Robinson did not know what was wrong with him; she could not call a doctor or the police for the phone was out of order and being without a car, she couldn't drive him herself. The only neighbors she knew were gone for Christmas vacation and the next closest were a long walk down the road, and she didn't want to take Geoffrey out in the cold or leave him there alone. She tried covering him with a blanket and giving him some cold water to drink, but he refused. I could not be reached nor could his father for he was away on a business trip.

Geoffrey was slowing down in everything: his intense sweating, his heavy breathing, and his shaking. Mrs. Robinson felt a ray of hope. Maybe it had been just some sort of spasm she thought, since he and her son had been running around all day. Standing up, she went up to get Todd whom she had told to stay in his room, for she didn't need his getting in the way or endless crying. Walking in to the living room, Mrs. Robinson's arm around her scared son's shoulder as a means of comfort, they both stopped dead in their tracks at the sight that lay before them....

I was now in the Jordan Marsh checking out aisle with the last of my xmas purchases. I was tired and again hungry and was in a rush to get home, for I was already 20 minutes late. Paying through my charge account, I hurriedly walked out into the cold November air with my bundle of merchandise. Finding the blue Chevy parked across from the entrance of Lechmere, I fumbled with the key and finally got all my packages and me into the car. Sitting down in the cold, vinyl seat, I blew out a deep breath and started the car. Backing out, I followed the out route to highway 95 Burkley where I got caught in a traffic jam as a result of a car accident. Swearing, I sat back and waited....

Geoffrey lay stiff and calm, nothing moving except the slow uprising of his chest as he breathed. Mrs. Robinson was sick now; she screamed and cried, "what the hell is going on!" as she sat next to his cold, limp body. He was unconcious. She decided there was no other choice but to send Todd out down the road to the neighbor's house for help. Of course Todd was terribly frightened about what was going on with his friend and now to be sent down the street alone, for help. They were both crying so much now that Mrs. Robinson couldn't see to buckle her son's coat. Finally getting it, she wrote an urgent, emergency help note to the neighbor. Letting him out, she yelled out to him to be careful and to hurry! Then she watched as far as his timid, slight figure was visible. Closing the door, she ran back to Geoffrey. "Why me God?" she asked desperately. Then she burst into a shower of flowing tears as she held her swollen head in her hands....

I was out of the jam and speeding down the open highway. The gut feeling I had felt in the pizzaria was ever so strong and tight now. I could feel something was wrong, but what was it? It couldn't be Geoffrey.......could it? No! No! I told myself and put the gas pedal to the floor. As I accelerated down the never ending pavement, all I could think of was my promise. That I'd be strong; I had to for Geoffrey.

Part Three

Todd was back and with a neighbor. Mrs. Robinson took her son in her arms and hugged him protectively. He was still quite shaken but not crying as hard. He was worn out, the brave little kid, Mrs. Robinson thought.

The distant neighbor Miss Godfrey was in a state of shock and didn't quite know what the hell was going on except for the bits and pieces Todd could tell her. Mrs. Robinson hastily explained the situation as she bustled about getting her stuff together and wrapping Geoffrey's cold and limp body in a blanket. As they carried him out and layed him on the back seat of Miss Godfrey's Honda Civic, Mrs. Robinson heard her phone ringing....

Meanwhile......I had stopped for gas at a highway station and decided I'd call Mrs. Robinson to check on Geoffrey. The gut feeling I had felt ever since I left the pizzaria earlier that afternoon was about Geoffrey, I knew. Letting the phone ring 9 times I hung up unsuccessfully. Turning to leave the booth I tried to remember her saying she'd be going somewhere that day. I really wanted to believe she had told me something so as to relieve my terribly uneasy feeling in my mind and stomach. But knowing she had told me nothing of the kind I scampered quickly across the thin icy slush to the car. Paying the gas attendant I pulled out spitting mud slush all over the incoming car. Getting back on the highway I checked my watch for the time, I was a half hour late. Letting the speedometer needle rest uneasily on 65 I realized I was sick. Sick with worry.

Miss Godfrey shaking as she turned the wheel, drove up and into the emergency section of the hospital. Parking, they got out Mrs. Robinson carrying Geoffrey while Todd clung to her pant leg. Everyone in the waiting room turned to look at them as they entered. Crossing the floor at a fast space the dismal group reached the check-in desk and Mrs. Robinson explained the story to the nurse while she held up the proof. (Geoffrey's body) The nurse immediately recognized the symptoms and paged some docter by the name of Winthrop. Turning back to them she told them that he was a diabetes specialist. Mrs. Robinson first not quite understanding soon realized that Geoffrey was a diabetic. He had supposedly run out of insulin (a liquid substance that regulates the sugar level in the bloodstream) and was now unconcious and in the critical state. The doctor came crashing through two grey double doors at the far end of the room his white coatails flapping in the breeze left by the outswinging doors. The nurse pointed to where they were standing and he came rushing over to them. Lifting up Geoffrey's eyelids the doctor's expression was blank. I wonder if they're trained to act like that Mrs. Robinson thought. The doctor took Geoffrey from Mrs. Robinson's shaking arms and placed him gently down on a moveable cot. Telling the nurse to look after them he wheeled Geoffrey out the steel doors in which he came and into the secret world beyond.

Sitting, Mrs. Robinson burst into tears along with Todd and Miss Godfrey. The nurse tried to be of some help but she was too shook up herself. Suddenly, Mrs. Robinson stopped crying and peered up at her sons tear stained face. "Todd we gotta be strong, ok?" she asked. Todd replied holding back some tears, "ok mom." and he tried to smile.

I pulled into Mrs. Robinson's driveway, jumped out and ran as fast as I could in my high heels across the lawn to the front door. Opening the storm door to knock a messy folded piece of blue stationary fell at my feet. Reaching down I picked it up and slowly unfolded it not wanting to know what it said. I read:

Dear Mrs. Morrison.

We are at the hospital your son is very sick. Please come quick!

Mrs. Robinson

Then it hit me. Today was Geoffrey's shot day. I was supposed to give him his insulin shot this morning but being so wrapped up in my personal plans for the day it totally slipped my mind. Mrs. Robinson being new to the neighborhood did not know about Geoffrey's disease. Oh!

God! What did I do? Terrible thoughts whizzed through my mind and I went running madly down the driveway tears flowing down my face. What if he was dieing or dead? I would never forgive my self. Burning down the driveway and out on the road I sped down the street praying for my son.

The doctor (Ronald Winthrop) came threw the same grey, steel doors with the same blank expression on his face. Yet this time his eyes appeared glassy as if he was tearful. He walked over to where they sat huddled together. He asked if he could speak to Mrs. Robinson alone. Getting up she looked puzzled, afraid and curious at the same time. Taking her into a small cubicle behind the check-in desk he told her that Geoffrey had fallen into a coma. (a deep and unawakenable sleep). She started to cry but he kept talking. "It's terribly important that we contact Geoffrey's mother, Mrs. Morrison. She knows about her son's disease and all the information about his last checkup, shot, etc. that we need to know. OK?" She shook her head trying to calm herself "I'll do anything I possibly can," she said lifting her head. He smiled "good, but, first let's get you and your friend some coffee." He put his arms around her shoulder and walked her tenderly out of the room.

I pulled up into the emergency parking lot and jammed the car crookedly across two parking places. I jumped out slamming the door and grabbing my purse at the same time. Running wildly out and in through the glass hospital doors I broke into the waiting room, sweat beading on my forehead and tears flowing down my face. Mrs. Robinson noticed me and ran into my awaiting arms calling my name and half screaming "Thank-God!," "Thank-God!" She was crying again. I couldn't cry anymore for my body and mind were totally numb. The doctor walked over to me and asked if I was Geoffrey's mom. I answered yes and asked where was he? The doctor explained the situation to me but I couldn't handle it. I broke down. Why did this have to happen to me? I thought. I swore I'd kill myself if my baby died.

Two days passed and Geoffrey remained in a coma. Our family life died down. We walked around in a numb shock praying and hoping. On the third day Geoffrey gave up. His strength was gone and he died.

When we got home that day after our last visit to the hospital, Tara came up to me and said "Mommie remember when you said as long a we loved Geoffrey he'd be ok." I didn't answer I just looked out across the top of her head and stared into space. "Well, didn't we love him enough?" she continued. I brought my gaze down to her eye level. "Yes, honey we loved him enough and we will always love him. He knew we loved him and died knowing it. We will remember him always." I watched as her baby blue eyes turned glassy with tears. "Yes we will remember him always," and I reached out and hugged her while we cried, together.

The End.

Appendix C

SKILLS FOR THEMES CHART

SKILLS FOR THEMES

1. THOUGHT - Is the idea interesting?

2. ORDER OF THOUGHT DEVELOPMENT
   A. Does the beginning focus your concept effectively?
   B. Does each idea lead to the next?
   C. Are there enough supporting details?
   D. Is there an effective conclusion?

3. CHOICE OF WORDS
   A. Have words been chosen for exactness?
   B. Do words keep a unified mood?

4. SENTENCES
   A. Does each sentence have an idea?
   B. Do sentences run together?
   C. Do you have sentence fragments?
   D. Are sentences varied in length?
   E. Are sentence beginnings varied?

5. SPELLING - How many words are misspelled?

6. CAPITALIZATION - How many were missed?

7. PUNCTUATION
   A. Periods
   B. Commas
   C. Semi-colons
   D. Question marks

E. Apostrophes

F. Quotation marks

G. Other

8. AGREEMENT
   A. Is number consistent (singular/plural)?

   B. Is verb tense consistent?

   C. Do subject/verb agree?

9. PENMANSHIP (or penpersonship) - legible?

10. APPEARANCE - Is the paper neat overall?

11. COMMUNICATION
    Does the paper communicate clearly
    to audience?

12. SUM - What is the total number of errors?

GRADES - Content

Grammar

Resources

Britton, James, *et al. The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18).* (Available from NCTE). London: Schools Council Publications, 1975.

Defines variations in roles of writers in relationship to writing. For students, understanding these roles can help them set a perspective for priorities.

Calkins, Lucy McCormick. "Learning to Throw Away." *Language Arts,* 56, 6 (October, 1979), pp. 747-752.

Articulates what students need to know about mistakes as opportunities, error as a way of learning.

Cooper, Charles R. and Odell, Lee. *Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging.* Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1977.

Provides an evaluation spectrum from which to choose what best suits student needs.

Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers.* London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Justifies faith in student writers.

Fadiman, Clifton and Howard, James. *Empty Pages: A Search for Writing Competence in School and Society.* Belmont, California: Fearon Pitman Publishers, Inc., 1979.

Connects writing to the rest of the learning process and insists (as few are willing to admit), "clear and effective writing is not simply a skill or a socioeconomic advantage. Because it expresses the integrity (or dishonesty) of an intellectual process, it is a moral activity." (p.3)

The Forum for Liberal Education. "Comprehensive Writing Programs." *Forum,* III, 6 (April, 1981).

Indicates what will be expected and demanded of those students who attend colleges and universities which emphasize student writing.

Goggin, William F. "Teaching Writing: A Backward Glance." *The Clearing House,* 53, 5 (January, 1980), pp. 233-235.

Alerts students to the necessity for exactness and describes ways to achieve it.

Graves, Donald. "Research Update: How Do Writers Develop?" *Language Arts,* 59, 2 (February, 1982), pp. 173-179.

Shows writing as problem solving by students; emphasizes the need to get students to care about content and to find the power of writing as a source of discovery and meaning; also emphasizes writing as a lab subject.

Gray, James and Myers, Miles. "The Bay Area Writing Project." *Phi Delta Kappan.* February, 1978, pp. 410-413.

Encourages teachers to reinvent the wheel in writing so students do the same; balances with the importance of discovering and applying the increasing body of knowledge about writing.

Lee, Hope Arnott and Lee, Alvin A., eds. *Wish and Nightmare.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972.

Processes literature in response to first the human voice, then what the story sings, and later devices such as what the image shows.

Macrorie, Ken. *Telling Writing.* Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Company, Inc., 1970.

Tells students to learn through the search for truth by combining subjective with objective, and to depend on their own powers of writing.

Murray, Donald M. "The Teaching Craft: Telling, Listening, Revealing." *English Education,* 14, 1 (February, 1982), pp. 56-60.

Only one example of how Murray models, in work over the years, the changes of a committed master writer and teacher.

National Council of Teachers of English. "Standards for Basic Skills Writing Programs." *The Leaflet,* Fall, 1979, pp. 18-20.

Broadens conventional notions of what can and should be expected of students.

Neville, Mark A. "Instrumental English." *English Journal,* 67, 7 (October, 1978), pp. 10-12.

Allowing students rather than teachers to create their own standards of good writing.

Ortiz, Simon. "Song, Poetry and Language—Expression and Perception." *A, a journal of contemporary literature,* 4, 2 (Fall, 1979), pp. 2-9.

Sensitively describes ways of interrelating experience and the expression of that experience.

Postman, Neil. *Teaching as a Conserving Activity.* New York: Delacorte Press, 1979.

Emphasizes forming metaphors and questions as structures which control the resulting writing.

Shaughnessy, Mina P. *Errors & Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Explores recognition of patterns of individual student errors as a pathway toward assisting students in overcoming their errors.

Weiss, Robert H. "The Humanity of Writing: A Cross Disciplinary Program." *Improving College and University Teaching,* 27, 4, pp. 144-147.

Recognizes writing as central to all academic disciplines and as the means of discovering, clarifying, and reinforcing learning.

White, Edward M., ed. *The Writer's Control of Tone: Readings, with Analysis, for Thinking and Writing About Personal Experience.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970.

Emphasizes more than private meanings; for example, small, everyday experiences which convey larger meanings.

Wilson, Carter. *A Green Tree and a Dry Tree.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972.

A novel revealing the thoughts of a sensitive teacher of writing who practices what he teaches.

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Keith Dunkley
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Mark Estey
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Kathy Grant
Billy Grinley
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Eric Kling
Calvin Knight
Joe Kovolyan
Keith Kwiatkowski
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Chris Pas
Billy Payson
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Krisy Porter
Chris Pothier
Chris Ramsden
Scott Rogers
Richard Ross
Holly Rozen
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Melissa Sims
Wayne Speliman
Kim Spofford
Brian Steele
Lori Sweeney
Patrick Timmins
Michelle Tveter
Tom Webster
Carol Wentworth
Jana White
Scott Whitney
Pam Wojas
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Nancy Marashio

Experiences during a decade and a half of teaching grades seven through twelve have taught Nancy Marashio to raise questions more than answers, to explore problems as much as solutions. Growing understanding about the nature of those questions and problems led her through a Master of Arts in English at Boston College, a Certificate of Advanced Study in Liberal Studies at Weleyan University, literature, language, and writing courses at a variety of colleges and universities, a contemporary literature and language institute at George Washington University, and fellowships in both the Exeter Writing Program and the Humanities Institute at Dartmouth. But the real source of her continuing interest in learning and teaching the writing process is her students.

She remains in her native state of New Hampshire, wondering, and working toward strengthening students in their ability to articulate their own progress and needs and in their application of the writing process to life.